

男子高校生で売れるっ子

下年の女に 「僕は女作家」 を

首をねじめられて
いる。

していけるけれども

I

-Time to Play- <上>

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress 男子高校生で売れっ子ライトノベル作家をしているけれど、年下のクラスメイトで声優の女の子に首を絞められている。

Volume 1 - Time to Play - First Half

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声優の女弟子に

下年のクラスメイトで
男子高校生で売れっ子
してりるけれど、
首を絞められてる。』

時雨沢恵一
ラスト・黒星紅白

—Time to Play— 〔上〕



男子高校生で売れっ子
ライトノベル作家を、でに
しているけれど、でに
し年下のクラスメイト
優の女の子
首を絞められている。

I

—Time to Play—〈上〉

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Designed by Toru Suzuki

隣、座つていいよね?
——ちょっと話がしたくて。





似鳥は、現役声優でありミーク役を演じる一つ年下のクラスメイト。

ミークは、『ヴァイス・ヴァーサ』に登場するサブキャラクターだ。

鍊金術によって作られた“ホムンクルス”——、つまり人造人間の一人。

お話である以上、基本的にキャラクターは美形揃いだが、

ホムンクルス達はさらに“人間離れた美”的持ち主、という設定にしている。

そして、ホムンクルスの特徴として全員がオッドアイ——、つまり左右の瞳の色が違う。

その色はホムンクルスによってバラバラだが、ミークの場合、右がワインレッド、左がイエロー。髪は金髪ショート。

着ているのは、露出が少なめでどこかエキゾチックな衣装。

そして、首に巻いている緑のマフラー。

今隣に座っている黒髪ロング眼鏡女子の似鳥絵里が、その声を演じる。

Prologue - Memories

Those warm hands,

Feel,

Very comfortable.

My head's,

Becoming

Very blurry.

I'm starting,

To feel tired.

But,

I can see,

The scene in front very well.

Very well.

Very well.

What happened?

Why did it end up like this?

I,

Always remembered very clearly,

Very clearly.

Very clearly.

I still,

Remember very well.

I will never forget.

Probably.

Never ever forget.

In my entire life.

Chapter 1 – April 10, I met her

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

I'm lying on the floor, my back stuck to the hard floor, and there's slight quivering and sounds felt on the icy floor.

This girl, who's my classmate, a year younger than me, and also acting as a voice actress, is seated on my belly, crouched over.

She's dressed in a thin blue sailor uniform as she reached her hands out at my neck. Her slender fingers are wrapped around my carotid pulse, seemingly stopping the blood flow.

Her hands are extremely cold.

They feel like a muffler locked around my neck.

Within my sights were black curtains on both left and right sides.

That's because her long, black hair is draped straight down. It's like a flower from the Southern countries, probably because of the conditioner. It's a nice smell.

And then, what I see in the middle of the curtains is her face, slightly dimmed due to the backlight.

She's crying. Her tears are dripping to the inside of the cell frame glasses lens. Her white, pretty teeth can be seen from her tight lips.

“Why!?”

She yells as she grabbed me by the throat, choking me hard.

I heard that humans are able to exert more strength when they're shouting. I never tried it before, but I can say that that's the truth after experiencing this for myself.

My throat's behind strangled from left and right, but I don't feel any pain.

And in contrast, ringing inside my head–

A drip of black ink lands silently. That black stain begins to spread gradually.

“Why!?”

She yelled again.

Why did it end up like this?

That's what I want to know.

The first time I met that girl was-

About a month and a half ago.

It's April 7th , the first Monday of this month, and the first day of the new High School year.

It has been a year since I went to school.

During that prior year, I took leave from school. I should be in the second year of high school from my 16th to 17th spring, but I was unable to attend school the entire time.

Now, I'm finally in my second year of high school.

And with the return to school, I transferred schools, from the Public High School I studied in year 1, to a private High School.

In this new school, the school won't question me on the lack of attendance as long as I've an appropriate reason and pass the exams.

And from this moment onward, I have to take leave from school once every week.

On that morning.

I stepped into the school for the second time ever since I completed the transfer. I found my name on the large class allocation board, and entered the classroom for the first time.

Naturally, I don't know anyone in this classroom.

This school's a co-ed, with an equal percentage of boys and girls. I heard that there'll only be a rearrangement of classes when entering our second year, so it's not a rarity to see people unfamiliar with others, sitting alone, like me here.

Soon after, the form teacher who's going to take care of us for 2 years entered. He's a middle-aged male teacher.

The opening ceremony's viewed from the television installed in the classroom.

And the principal conveyed his message through the footage. I think that this method of not requiring students to move to the gym really is comfortable and good.

Following this, my classmates begin with their self-introductions, which is not to be omitted.

I'm seated at the right side of the blackboard, the row closer to the corridor, and the second seat from the back. After waiting for a long time, it's finally my turn.

Once the girl sitting in front of me finished her line, she sat down.

I stand up, state my name, and the foods I like, something I definitely had to say.

There are a lot of foods I like, and I chose coffee in this case. It's ordinary, but the other students did mention stuff like Ramen or Sushi, and the girls mention sweets. It's really ordinary.

Most of the students would add on, saying some things about their club activities or hobbies to spice up the atmosphere in class. It seems everyone has a hidden understanding that they could not let it end up this.

As for me, there's nothing much I could say. Once it's my turn to speak up, I ponder seriously for a brief moment, but was still unable to think of anything to talk about.

And so, I accidentally,

Blurted out what I should not have said.

"Well...I transferred into this school during this semester, and it's my second time wearing the uniform and entering the school. It feels like everything seems so new, like a new student."

It's still fine till this point.

I feel that my classmates are starting to show concern for me, and I think I hear some voices of the heart, like "I see", "so you're a transfer student", "that's rare".

And what I said next was inappropriate,

"I took leave from school for a year before this, so I'm very happy to be able to return back to a high school life."

These were my true thoughts.

However—

My classmates start to rumble.

"Eh? Older than us?"

"A retainee?"

This time, what I heard was not the voices of the heart, but actual whispers I could hear from my ears.

Even though I realized it was a bad situation, it was all too late.

The atmosphere in class changed from the understanding of "there's a transfer student" to a 'so there's a senior who's supposed to be our upperclassman'.

It was only a while later did I realize that there were no retained students in this school, that there were as many goldfish that could speak as there were classmates older than them.

I've left school for a year, and during this time, I was always in contact with people older than me—

I have already lost the natural feeling of ‘a year difference’ for a high school student.

I felt that I said something I should not have.

This was the wish I set for myself when I arrived at this school, and the promise I made with my mother.

That I have to handle my studies well, make good friends even if they are few, and enjoy the high school life I will only have once.

In other words, being a ‘high school student’.

But—

I ended up grounding myself regarding this matter. I made a miscue right from the first day.

“...That’s how things are. Please take care of me...”

What’s with that ‘ That’s how things are. Please take care of me’ line? That’s ridiculous.

I was the one who said ‘I’m a year older than you!’. Wasn’t I the one hiding this fact until a while ago?

After ending this greatest failure in my life, I slump weakly on the chair, feeling myself to be so foolish that I don’t have the strength to sigh.

“Hm, well, next. You must be the last one, I suppose?”

The teacher did not follow up with this, but this was probably to prevent the wound from expanding any further.

“Yes!”

And then, I hear a cheerful voice from the girl seated behind me, coupled with both the sound of her pulling her chair back and standing up. At this moment, I realized that she’s a girl.

I didn’t have the strength to look back, so I continued to maintain this position, despite it being rude to her.

“Eri Nitadori. My given name and family name both rhyme with ‘ri’.”

Her voice was intriguing.

She surely wasn’t loud, but I can hear her clearly. The voice seems to pass through my ears and reach the brain directly.

“I transferred into this school last Autumn, and I was in the second class. My favorite foods are basically all kinds of them, but the one I really want to eat for all 3 meals a day is—”

I begin to guess her answer.

Is it a sweet befitting a girl? Cake or parfait? Or was it some ordinary curry or ramen? Maybe some unexpected katsudon with sauce on it?

I started to challenge her.

And I began thinking all sorts of possible dishes she could mention before she answered.

What she said next was,

“Horse sashimi!”

She said.

I lost.

This was overwhelmingly, or I should say, something not many would say to be a favorite food, and so my classmates laughed heartily. Even the teacher laughed.



It's splendid.

She was able to blow aside the unnecessary heavy atmosphere caused by the carelessness of the student right before her.

Even though this prefecture is the producer of horse sashimi, I really couldn't fathom a second year high school girl eating horse sashimi for every meal.

"I'm not good at sports, so I'm not in any club activity. However, I do bring my dog out every single day. Our dog's called 'Gonsuke'¹, 3 years old—"

I continued to hear her chat happily about her pet dog, curious as to how this 'horse sashimi girl' looked like, and so, I slowly turned my head around.

And then, I look up.

I saw a bespectacled girl who's rather tall, and had quite long hair.

She's probably about 1.7m tall, I guess? For a girl, she's really rather tall.

She's definitely not plump, but for some reason, she doesn't seem delicate either. She said that she's not good at sports, but I thought she should be a talent heavily recruited by the volleyball or basketball club.

The evenly long black hair of hers is so long it passes her chest and reaches her abdomen. Her bangs are in evenly straight, and to summarize, it's a long bob haircut, and on both left and right side of her hair are button-like hairpins, probably made of felt?

Her skin's white, her facial features are distinct, the face lines and nose bridge are rather straight, and she has quite the pretty face.

She's wearing cell-framed glasses, colored pale blue-green like the haoris of the Shinsengumi. The face lines behind the lens were not contorted in any way, so maybe it's either a decoration or that the spectacles degree isn't that much. The irises in those large eyes were a thick brown.

If she's a character in a novel, this is probably how I would describe her.

She's blessed with a fine body figure and face, a plain Yamato Nadeshiko hairstyle, one who looked so unbalanced, and yet befitting of her.

That was what I thought.

She was a beauty.

One of these days, I'll take that saying and 'make use of it'.

¹ Basically means 'manservant'

This classmate of mine called Nitadori adjusted her sights moderately as she continued to chatter about her pet dog Gonsuke. It is clear that everyone in class is paying attention to the cute episodes.

If it were me, I probably won't end up doing such stupid miscues. I wondered as I heard her words. We're seated rather close, so Nitadori wasn't looking at me. If she's looking at me, I probably will be looking away.

Nitadori ended her proud introduction of her dog at the opportune time, and then said that anyone who wished to see the photos could check out her smartphone. This really is a wonderful appeal.

And looking at this—

Anyone who likes dogs, no matter whether boy or girl, can talk to her regarding that. From there, she would be able to converse with others. Her self introduction's a stark contrast to a certain somebody before her, a classic sample.

And in the end, she adds on, "Please take care of me for the next two years".

She lets her long hair dangle to a side of the chair's backrest, and slowly sat down.

At that moment, she was right in front of my sights, and our eyes met for the first time.

I intended to look away, but I couldn't.

"Eh!"

For the earnest face she showed till this past suddenly froze, and she let out a soft shriek. She turned her face to the corridor, seemingly evading my sights.

This action was ostensibly one of somebody who saw something she should not have. It felt to me that she would not be this petrified even if she saw a ghost.

After seeing her actions, I slowly turned to the front, and sighed in my heart

I wondered that if my first day was going to be like this, I might as well not repeat my year after all.

That was why—

"Can I sit beside you?"

I was really shocked when that Nitadori suddenly spoke to me so earnestly.

It was April 10, a Thursday, 3 days after the opening ceremony.

I was seated on the Limited Express back then.

From the town where I live in, this train ride allows me to reach the metropolis in about 3 hours. I was seated at the last row of the free seating carriage car, at the left side, leaning by the window.

It's the evening, and the train carriage is still empty after having left the station, so there shouldn't be a need for anyone to sit beside me. Even if the reason of wanting to sit at the back row is 'my luggage's too big for the rack', or 'I want to adjust my reclining chair', there is still the right side of the aisle that's empty

That's why I was surprised to hear the meaning of those words, despite not knowing who it was. I lift my head up from the printouts of the drafts, and when I found it to be Nitadori, who's seated behind me every day, I was further taken aback.

"Hi! Good afternoon."

"..."

I remain silent as I stare blankly at this taller girl standing on the aisle.

Naturally, Nitadori's not dressed in a uniform, and I'm not really sure of the details, but I could clearly see that it's a posh looking one-piece dress.

Nitadori seemed to have assumed that I may have forgotten about her,

"Erm, we're in the same class. I'm Eri Nitadori, seated right at the back."

And so, she introduced herself again.

"Ah...y-yes—"

I barely managed to force out a reply somehow. And then, I slowly spoke,

"I knew that, actually."

I knew about all those till this point. What I didn't know what why she would talk with me.

Nitadori then gave an amused snicker,

"Hm? Honorific language? Even though you're an upperclassman?"

"Ah, no...it's nothing, Miss Nitadori."

"Adding a 'Miss'? Eve though you're older?"

"..."

I took a breath to calm my heart down.

"No...erm, is 'Nitadori' fine?"

And then, I pretended to remain as calm as possible while conversing with her normally. I wondered how many years it had been since I talked to a girl of a similar age, but having realized that I may need a long time to derive that answer, I gave up.

“Of course. Can I sit beside you then?”

At that time, I had my backpack on the seat beside me. Inside it were my favorite laptop, books, change of clothes.

My backpack was wide open inside, so while reaching out to zip it with one arm, I blurted my honest opinion,

“Well, I’m fine with that...but why here? Aren’t there empty seats everywhere?”

It might have been rude of me to say that, but that was what I truly thought. I had no idea at all why Nitadori insisted on sitting beside me.

It had been 4 days since school started, but I never conversed with her in class. Rather, I never spoke to anyone in class.

Everyone in class viewed me as ‘an older classmate’, and treated me with caution, so naturally, there wasn’t any who would speak to me. I guess they were all wondering if they should be using honorifics with me. If one were to do so, so would the rest, and vice versa. However, nobody dared to be the first one up to the challenge.

I too was worried if my classmates would shun me if I tried to approach them, and never did so in the end. The gap of a year was too large for me, who’s already ineffectual at communicating.

I felt it is merciless of me to be saying ‘there are still other seats’ to a person wanting to sit beside me. While pondering that it was expected of her to be angry, I awaited her answer.

“I want to talk with you.”

And then, she said this. She was not smiling, but it did not seem like she was angry.

“Erm...talk about what?”

I place my backpack on my thighs as I asked this, dumping the rolled-up manuscript into my back. It was just information I printed from home, so it was fine for me even if it was wrecked.

“Thanks.”

Nitadori tied her long hair to the back of her neck in a polite manner, and let it drape from her right shoulder to her chest, quickly sitting down beside me.

She turned to the left, and with our shoulders practically touching each other, she stared at me right in the eyes, and answered my question with a hushed voice,

“I want to talk about work.”

“Huh? Whose?”

“Whose? Ours.”

“...?”

I did not understand what she meant at all. What work was there for two high school students to talk about? I placed my bag at my feet.

And then,

“Sorry but I don’t understand what you’re saying here.”

I answered honestly.

Nitadori then showed a serious look immediately.

“I see...I thought you would have realized it already.”

“...Realized what?”

“About me.”

“...”

“I seem to be mistaken about something. Sorry.”

I stare at Nitadori, who looked to be a little disappointed.

“...”

I started to wonder if she was an ill-natured girl after all.

Perhaps she wanted to tease this ‘older’ classmate she coincidentally met, and would leave the seat wit a cackle.

I had that image flashing through my mind at that instant, and I even had the image of her saying some harsh, sharp words at the end.

Even if that were the case,

“Hey, hold it there! What do you mean by that? Explain to me!”

I probably would not be raging and chasing after her with such amazing manliness.

I probably would feel a little hurt, and would probably end up being ‘used’ by her

“But I’m not trying to tease you here, you know?”

Nitadori said, completely denying my thoughts. I wonder if she’s an esper.

And so, what she said next,

Caused my heart to stop in shock.

“Are you going for the After Record for ‘Vice Versa’ tomorrow, sensei?”

Normally, the slight quiver and tremors on the fast moving Limited Express feel comfortable. I did at times treat the carriage car as a cradle and slept soundly on it.

But at this point, I felt that the sounds and tremors were akin to a massive earthquake.

It was rumbling away, and I felt it was trying to throw me out of my seat.

This was the first time in my life that I wondered why there was no safety belts on the train. My hands were grabbing onto the armrest.

“Wh-why...ho-ho-how...?”

I stare right into Nitadori’s eyes as I barely eke out these words, and the rest ended up as gibberish.

I actually wanted to say,

“How did you know about this?”

“Ah, I guess from your expression that you want to ask ‘how did you know’, right?”

I was unable to say anything, dumbfounded for 5 seconds like a doll, and Nitadori took the initiative to speak up.

I nodded.

“How, did you know...?”

And then, since it did not matter at this point, I said this line.

“Pfft!”

Nitadori let out a little chuckle, and I forgot my current predicament as I saw the smile of the pretty girl up close. However, there was no way I could forget about that. I immediately got up from my seat, and surveyed the carriage.

There were 5 heads I could see.

Two of them were seated at the front-most, side by side. They definitely must be the middle-aged couple waiting for the train behind me a while back, and from their hiking getup, I suppose they went to the hills visible from my room, and were on their way back. There was a lot of snow on the hilltops as the weather was still cold.

A young man, probably a salaryman, was seated a few seats behind them at the window side. Seated at the row behind him at the right window side was a college male who seemed to be traveling. I did see them on the platform.

Closest to me was a young female seated alone near the aisle in the middle of the carriage car, dressed in gray pants and suit. I did not see her on the platform, and she seemed to be of the working class who just finished a dispatch job.

Since there was no one else nearby, I did not have to worry about others eavesdrop if I were to speak at with a normal audible voice. It seemed Nitadori realized my thoughts as she said,

“You’re really worried about other people noticing it? Don’t worry. I’ll make sure that nobody else will overhear us.”

“Thanks...”

I sit down as I listen to her slightly hushed voice, and turn my face to the right, seeing Nitadori’s face that was extremely close to me, and asked,

“How did you know?”

“Well then, what do you think?”



She answered my question with a question.

“It’s easy for me to tell you the answer, but that’s no fun now, isn’t it? You’ll soon know, so think about it.”

That definitely was what she meant.

And so, I began to ponder, carefully listing out all the possibilities I could eliminate, and the possibilities I could consider.

I spent 2 minutes on that. I didn’t know whether that was too long or too short.

And during this time, I continued to stare at the back of the seat in front of me, not knowing what sort of expression Nitadori was showing. Perhaps she was enjoying herself, maybe she was bored, or maybe she was surprised.

“I see...”

After staring at the back for two minutes, I let out these words,

“So that’s what it means by ‘our work’.”

“What do you mean?”

Nitadori asked. Clearly, what she meant was,

“Please look at others in the eyes when talking to someone.”

I slowly turn my face to Nitadori.

And so, I stare at Nitadori, the bespectacled girl—

Giving me a victorious smile.

I spoke up,

“Nitadori...you’re a voice actress, participating in the animation of my light novel.”

I’m a professional author.

I wrote a novel titled ‘Vice Versa’—

Currently, it’s lined in the Pocket Book (Bunko) section of the bookstore.

This work is the first work I published in my life, and currently, I’m continuing this work.

‘Vice Versa’ is classified as a ‘light novel’.

Now, what is a light novel? What kind of novel is considered a light novel?

There are some who say that it's a novel with a large number of anime-styled illustrations on the cover, color illustrations, and insert illustrations.

Most of the light novels I see in a bookstore are the same, and I do think that this definition explains a characteristic, appearance-wise; however, there are light novels without any illustrations.

There are some who say that any books sold under (apparent) light novel publishers can be considered as light novels.

I do think this viewpoint is easy to understand. However, there are cases of books printed under a light novel imprint before, only to have their illustrations removed and sold as contemporary literature works.

There are some who say that the age group of light novel readers is higher than children literature, that the main viewership derive from high school students.

As a purchasing consumer, this is what I think. However, despite the advancement in age, many will continue to read light novels, including the many numbers of college students and adult readers. Thus, light novels need not necessarily be limited to 'a work targeted at high school students'.

Then, do we classify the story according to the genre? Not necessarily.

Light novels practically encompass all kinds of genres, like fantasy, comedies, action, mystery, history, romance, youth. Of course, there is an exceptional number of works like fantasy and romcom.

In the end, there is still not a single person able to give a clear definition for light novels.

I feel that most of us, including me-

Are already calling it 'light novels', or a portmanteau 'ranobe', a term that is defined incompletely, and will continue on like this.

'Vice Versa' is published and sold by 'Dengeki Bunko'.

Currently, there are more than 10 light novel publishers in the market, and the largest of them is Dengeki Bunko.

The company 'ASCII Media Works' (Used to be called 'Media Works') established the company

'Dengeki Bunko' in 1993. That was before I was born.

Strictly speaking, the company 'ASCII Media Works' no longer exists,, for it is bought and absorbed into the mega corporation 'Kadokawa Group. The name sticks however because the name 'Brand Company' is too vague to define a purpose, so with this nostalgic feeling, I continue to use the term 'ASCII Media Works'.

In over 20 years of history, Dengeki Bunko has published big-selling works from my colleagues.

Whenever there is a bestseller made, sales revenue will increase, and the brand will gradually expand in the shop.

What this 'gradually expand in the shop' means is basically increasing the capacity taken up in the shop, allowing customers to see the works of this company more easily.

The following year since its inception, this Dengeki Bunko brand holds an annual 'Dengeki Novel Prize'. (Before 2003, it was titled the 'Dengeki Game Novel Prize').

Any author can debut with Dengeki Bunko as long as they win this Newcomer Novel award (there's an illustration award held at the same time.)

It was said this is the driving force behind Dengeki Bunko's rapid development, discovering authors through the contest, and promoting popular works.

It is a very popular imprint, so there were increases in participation every year. At this point, there are thousands of them.

It was about 3 years ago when I took part in this, hoping to enter the gateway to success.

Back then, I was just a 9th grader.

The annual Dengeki Novel Prize deadline was April 10th (In other words, this day).

It was the previous day 3 years ago, April 9th, right after the new school semester started

I submitted the long novel I wrote to the post office on the day right before the deadline.

And then, I failed.

There were too many people registering for the Dengeki Novel Prize, and so, the judging was long as a result.

After the submissions before the deadline, there was a first judging to pick out hundreds out of the thousands of entries. At the second judging, there would be approximately one-third left. At the third judging, dozens of them.

And so, at the fourth judging, there would be 10 or so picked for the final judging.

Once the final selections are read by the judging committee, the grand prize, gold prize, silver prizes and so on would be decided at the end of September, and the results would be announced on October 10.

The award-winning prizes would be published in February the following year. At that instance, the participating authors from the prior year would be recruited as professionals. Dengeki Bunko would release its books on the 10th, and the brand 'Mediaworks Bunko', under the some editorial group but released as a contemporary label, releases its books on the 25th.

If it were an ordinary newcomer contest, there would be any debuts for those that failed to make the cut. This would mean "Too bad. Try again next year, okay?"

However, in this Dengeki Novel Prize, there are chances for those who did not make the cut to become an author.

First off, most of the entries that can make it to the final selections can make debuts starting March.

Also, even if there were entries that failed to make it to the final selections, they can be put under an editor-in-charge as long as their works are recognized, before they finally become authors (naturally, there aren't many of these people).

These people will continue to hold meetings with the editor-in-charge, either to fine-tune the works to improve its completion, or to rewrite the work into something completely different.

My entry failed to make the cut.

But right now, it's being published.

Now then, did my work make it into the final selections and had a chance to be published? That wasn't it.

My journey was a little complicated.

First off, my entry failed to make the cut at the fourth selection, not even one of the final selections.

I learned that I failed to make the cut through the announcement on the official website.

I was really delighted when I saw my name appearing on the third selection results. If I could make it to the final selections, I would basically be able to debut as a professional. Thus, I was waiting anxiously for the results.

However, my work failed to get to the end.

Finding it regretful, I felt that it was a proud accomplishment for me to be able to make it all the way there.

Feeling encouraged, I intended to continue registering the following year, or take part in another newcomer contest.

The editorial branch would write some feedback to those that made the second round, so I would take reference and encourage myself.

While I was thinking about these and preparing for my examinations in October—

The phone in my house rang. It was a number from Tokyo.

Harboring some hope, I picked up the phone, and found that it was from the editorial department of Dengeki Bunko. The one calling was the editor-in-charge who really took care of me later on.

While I was extremely tense in my response, the editor-in-charge spoke,

“Are you really a 9th grader? There is something I wish to talk to you about. If possible, do you mind asking your parents along to the Tokyo editorial branch? Otherwise, I would be fine with paying you a visit instead.”

On that day, one week after the phone call.

My mother and I arrived at the editorial branch of ASCII Mediaworks, and there, I learned of the facts.

The reason why my novel did not make the final selections was due to my age.

The delightful thing was that my entry was highly rated. All the committee members felt that the story really interesting, and that alone would have undoubtedly ranked me as one of the final selections. On a side note, all the editors at Dengeki Bunko took part in the fourth selections.

But if this work was to be part of the final selections—

I would have to wait for my book to be released in the earlier half of the next year, no matter whether I won or not.

If I did, the work would be released on the following February. If I did not, it would be during March or April earliest. The author has to first consider this, and ‘edit’ the entry manuscript.

While I know of this very well, I didn’t know back then that the entry manuscripts would never be released directly. There had to be editorial work where the author and the editor-in-charge vet through the novel to varying extents.

Light novels will typically continue to form a series, and this would help increase sales figures (unless the ending of the story is done splendidly). Thus, it would be highly beneficial for me to write continuations and establish the story before I can officially debut. Thus, it is necessary to continue writing.

If I was stuck in such a predicament, it would not be hard to imagine how much it would affect my preparations for the exams.

“If I’m going to debut as an author the next year, I’m not going to high school!”

I might say such a thing.

This newcomer award is held to recruit outstanding authors. For an enterprise, it is upright to publish interesting and popular books, but this should not compromise a person’s future.

Thus, the editorial branch judged this with caution, causing me to fail at the fourth selections.

Upon hearing those words, my mother was really worried.

As for me, my heart was basically swinging by the scale.

“No! I’ll write this even if I have to prepare for the exams at the same time!”

I was feeling frustrated.

“Thank you for thinking so much about me.”

And at the same time, feeling gracious. Even the me back then understood that being an author only meant that the publisher would promise to publish a book for me, and would not guarantee that the earnings would be enough to continue maintaining my livelihood.

No matter what I thought, it was an established fact that could not be overturned. I tried my best to change my thinking and harbor grateful thoughts.

But the story did not end like that.

The editor-in-charge gave a proposal on the spot.

The work itself was really amazing, and if I was willing, they would publish this in a paperback a little later on.

However, there was no need for me to be anxious. For that purpose, the work would definitely start only after I was done with my examinations.

And so, we would contact each other once my high school entry examinations were ended.

Lastly, they assured that they would not reveal about this.

Naturally, it was a given that I devoted myself wholeheartedly to preparing for the examinations.

I intended to high school, but in this situation, there is a large carrot dangling in front of me,

‘Once I enter high school, I can debut as an author at Dengeki Bunko. In other words, the bookstores will sell my created work, and people will read it’.

This carrot was glowing brightly, like the sun out of a sunrise.

Either way, I could not mess up on the examinations. I devoted my entire time to studying, while secretly writing some manuscripts. This was easily exposed however.

The following Spring, or in other words, 2 years ago.

I was eligible to enroll for my first choice public school.

On the day I learned that I passed, I gave a call to the editorial branch

“I passed! Can I go over to you the following Monday?”

Now that I think about it, I really was rude and forceful.

I really am grateful for the editor-in-charge who could only smile wryly and make time for an appointment with me.

And so, I decided to become an author.

I devoted most of my Spring break on meetings, finishing my edits, and finally managed to finish my manuscript in mid-April.

The first volume of ‘Vice Versa’ was released on August 10.

That was approximately 2 years ago, and I was just 16 years old, a 10th grader.

The award-winning works were released on February, and those that failed to win awards but made the final selections had their works published between April and July.

As aforementioned, it is not a rarity in the Dengeki Novel Prize contest to see entries published even though they failed to make the final selections.

In other words, my works were of that type, but a release date in August during the same year was really too early.

‘Vice Versa’ was published to the world as a result, becoming a major hit.

The delightful fact is that the comments for the first volume were good, and there were decent sales. With the second volume released in October spurring things, there was a record high in sales when the 3rd volume was released the following January.

The editor-in-charge did say that I was one of the faster writers under the Dengeki Bunko flagship. Of course, I was not the fastest.

I continued to attend high school as I continued writing the manuscripts, editing—

When the 3rd volume was released, I completed the manuscripts for the 5th volume.

At the same time, it was 3 months before the first year of high school ended, and there was talk about 'Vice Versa' becoming an anime.

This really was a delightful proposal, but I knew that if it becomes an anime, the original author would have a lot of work to do. If I have to assist in the anime, I will have to help with the settings and scenarios, and check the scripts, so whatever I have to do will increase dramatically.

I can choose to provide the bare minimal inspection, but I really wanted to help out as much as I could.

At the same time, I wanted to continue writing this series. My passion for writing became more intense than before.

With this sudden spike in workload being anticipated, I began to brood.

I'll just drop out of high school.

The moment I proposed this, the editor-in-charge immediately answered me,

"No can do."

The editorial branch would only permit me to provide the bare minimum in assistance, even if it was against my wishes.

Of course, my mother had the same view, even though she did not tell me off.

And then, like a three-way talk, I again discussed matters with my mother and the editor-in-charge—

And thus, the idea of 'absence from school for a year' was born.

There was no doubt I would be busy throughout the entire year, so I might as well take leave from school.

And during this time, I could work any much as I wanted.

And then, we agreed that I would definitely repeat my year at a private school, where attendances was not so strict. I would then study for 2 years, and I had to graduate from high school no matter what. If there was nothing stopping me, I was to also aim for college.

And so, I worked hard as accordingly to plan,

From the previous April to March this year, which was last month.

I continued to write continuations for 'Vice Versa'.

During the previous year when I took leave, there were 5 volumes released, and they were released in April (fourth volume), June (fifth volume), August (sixth volume), October (seventh volume), and December (eighth volume).

The ninth volume was released this January, and the manuscripts for the tenth and eleventh volume, expected to be sold in July and September, were already completed. At this point, the twelfth volume, planned for release in November, is in the editing phase.

At the same time, I provided assistance to the animation team, taking part in every single script meeting, and checked through a massive amount of setting information.

I really enjoyed myself.

After ending this one tumultuous year, I transferred to a private high school as planned.

I never revealed any personal information, and there were few who knew my true identity.

And thus, I intended to hide my identity as an author in the new school. I felt that this would not be revealed unless I said so myself.

And then—

All these were exposed within a few days.

“Nitadori...you’re a voice actress, participating in the animation of my light novel.”

“That’s correct!”

Nitadori raised her right index finger in response to my words.

Right, it’s almost impossible to think of any other possibilities.

I guess it was too long spending two minutes thinking about this

The anime ‘Vice Versa’ is planned to be aired on broadcast television this July. This news was already announced before.

And the audio recording for this anime, the so called ‘after record’, first began last week.

It was Friday, April 4th.

The editor-in-charge and I were headed to the recording studio in the city for the first time. As the author, I intended to attend all the after records every Friday.

‘Vice Versa’ is a story with lots of characters, and there were some differences in the story’s timeframe when adapted to the anime, so there ended up being lots of characters appearing in the first episode.

And thus, there were so many voice actors in the recording studio that there weren’t enough chairs to sit. There were also famous voice actors any fan worth their salt would know of.

And so, before the recording began,

"Now then, I will like to introduce the original author here! His real identity isn't revealed however, so please treat what you see and hear as a secret! Okay, now sensei, come in!"

The producer suddenly said these words, and dragged me into the recording booth.

I assumed I was to sit at the control room where the recording instruments were, and I was so nervous it would be one of my top 3 anxious moments in my life. To be honest, I really wanted to run away.

After I tottered into the room like a captured rabbit, the producer began to introduce me to the voice actors.

I was on hiatus from school, but the voice actors had all kinds of reactions when they learned that I was a 17-year-old high school student.

"Wow! So such people exist...?" (A veteran male voice actor with a rough voice)

"So young!" (A young handsome voice actor who's very popular with the ladies.)

"Amazing, isn't it?" (A pretty voice actress who acted as many heroines and released many CDs).

I was never this embarrassed upon hearing these words.

And the producer demanded that I record some 'original author's greetings'.

I don't remember what I did say back then, but I guess it's probably Japanese, since I don't know of any other languages.

After the recording, I asked the editor-in-charge of his opinion regarding my words,

"Well...hm...it's fine...I guess?"

As he ended his reply with a question, I didn't dare to ask any further about that.

It was that kind of situation during the previous after record—

And naturally, there was no way I could have remembered the faces of so many voice actors.

"Sorry, I didn't remember your face."

But even so, I apologized to Nitadori.

"There's no need to."

And she answered so simply.

"Only a superhuman can remember that many faces in that kind of situation."

And she even excused me.

"But that greeting was interesting."

I really hoped that she forgot about it. And while I look up at the heavens,

“Hey, were you shocked by all these things?”

Nitadori asked, seemingly enjoying herself here.

“Of course I am!”

I let out a voice louder than I assumed, probably because of relief. And then, I lowered my voice immediately,

“...I was nearly shocked to death.”

“Is there really anyone who died due to shock?”

“Eh? Erm...I guess?”

Since it's a logical question, I thought I had to investigate it afterwards.

And so, I was first shocked by her, and then relieved after clarifying the reason—

I felt the difficulty of talking with her has lowered somewhat, and it's not like I'm conversing with someone I'm unfamiliar with.

“I see...so you're a voice actress, Nitadori...did you deliberately keep it a secret at school?”

Even I, unused to conversing with others, felt at ease when talking with her. Maybe it's because of that that I took the initiative to ask her.

Nitadori smiled, and nodded,

“Yeah, I don't feel the need to brag about it. But since this is the name I'm using, it'll be revealed as long as anyone wants to check up on me. Well, we'll just see how it goes when it happens though.”

“I see.”

It's a little weird to hear the words ‘this is the name I'm using’, but I didn't mind since I knew what she was trying to say. More importantly, I feel that ‘I have to protect her secret no matter what’.

“Hey, sensei—”

“Wait! ...Are you going to call me that?”

I interrupted Nitadori's words in surprise, and she simply answered as a matter of fact,

“But you're the original author, aren't you? And you're a year older than me. Logically, I should be addressing you with proper honorifics.”

“No, just call me normally...if possible, please don't use honorifics with me. Also, I don't mind you calling me by my real name.”

I requested as I asked, but Nitadori immediately replied,

“But it’s not a good thing if I’m to call you at at the studio, right? It’ll be bad...for me too.”

“Ahh, I guess...”

With that, my real name will be revealed to everyone who only knows of my pen name It’s not a particularly damaging thing to me, but it’s really improper for Nitadori. She probably doesn’t intend to say that we’re classmates, I guess.”

“It’s fine. I’ll pay note to the situation. I promise that I won’t call you sensei at school, and I definitely won’t reveal your real identity. I swear.”

“Thanks. It’s really great that you’re willing to do that.”

“Or rather—I won’t say anything to you in school!”

Nitadori said some words that appeared really harsh on first glance with a smile on her face.

“Erm...well, I guess that’s good enough...”

And this time, I quickly realized that if I was to casually talk with Nitadori at school, our secrets will be revealed.

Since I couldn’t think of any situations where there wouldn’t be any people around us, or when only the both of us would be alone, it would be wise to not say anything at school.

“I understand. I’ll do the same too to avoid letting slip.”

I agreed, and inadvertently blurted out my true thoughts,

“You’re amazing, Nitadori.”

“Amazing? How?”

I then said to the startled her,

“You’re already a professional voice actress at such a young age.”

And she immediately answered,

“There are many young people in both the acting world and the voice acting world. Besides, aren’t you the same too, sensei?”

The Limited Express dashed on smoothly.

Entering April, the sunset felt later than usual, and it was still bright outside the window.

“Sensei, are you going to continue riding this train?”

In response to Nitadori’s question,

“I plan to.”

I nodded hard.

The after record that I, no, we would be attending begins every Friday morning at 10am. This schedule would not change unless there were exceptional circumstances.

Thus, I have to take this Limited Express to Tokyo every Thursday and spend the night in the hotel, or in other words, spending the night there. There are 13 episodes for the anime in total, so the after record would take 3 months.

From this moment forth, I would continue to request absence from school on Fridays. Of course, I did explain the reasons to the school, and obtained permission to do so. Or rather, it was the opposite. I did transfer to this school because I would be allowed to do this.

“I can take the night bus...but to be honest, I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep.”

And once I said this, Nitadori nodded,

“Right right! I think this is the case too! It’s hard at 10A, right? If the Shinkansen’s around, we could have made it in time if we leave early.”

The 10A Nitadori spoke of is the simplified term of the after record that begins at 10am (though I only knew of this recently).

This is the earliest time slot possible, but many of the voice actors are nocturnal folk, so this seems to be tough for them, and really dismotiveating as a result.

“It’s true. But I—”

I really like to take the Limited Express of the non-Shikansen train lines. The cars are mostly empty, and since I always start my rides at the first stop of each line, there’s definitely seats for me to take. The train ride is long, and I can do what I want to do; the scenery is beautiful too when the weather’s fine.

When I expressed my true thoughts, Nitadori answered,

“Maybe I might like this train after this.”

Back then, I didn’t notice the meaning behind these words.

While conversing, the train conductor came to check the Limited Express tickets.

Sometimes, the train conductor of this train was a young woman, and this is the case here.

I don’t know what sort of ideas this conductor lady would have after seeing us seated side by side in the empty carriage.

But surprisingly, after inspecting my ticket, her face showed a flash of surprise when she continued on with Nitadori. I didn't know why that was so.

After the conductor left, Nitadori asked,

"Sensei, where do you plan to stay once you reach Tokyo?"

And then, she said,

"Maybe...the editorial branch? Are you going to...sleep under the table with a sleeping bag...?"

"No, that's not it."

I said while giving a slight smile.

Nitadori doesn't seem familiar with the editorial branch and the publishing industry., and while thinking that this is an ordinary person's response, I answer,

"When I have to spend the night in Tokyo due to work, the Dengeki Bunko editorial branch will book me a hotel room near Idabashi station."

"Heh? Where?"

Thinking that this wasn't something that needed secrecy, I answered by telling her the name."

That beautiful hotel's located between Idabashi and Suidoubashi stations, and I'm rather satisfied with the hotel, which has the option of a late checkout time at 12pm, and was a walking distance away from the editorial branch. Certain rooms were positioned such that the 'Kadokawa 3rd Tower Building' could be seen.

"Hm...."

Nitadori didn't react in any way, showing an expression that showed she did not hear of this before.

And so, thinking that she would have known about it somehow, I quipped,

"But during the end-of-year party the previous two years—"

At that time, I was living at a hotel that was named the same as a large dome stadium.

It was a round stadium akin to a large balloon. People will normally use it as an example of large, but most who had yet to see the real thing themselves would not have an exact idea to that (maybe it's easier to understand by comparing it to the Blue Whale or the Yamato battleship).

That 43 storey tall hotel is located right beside the dome.

"Ahh!"

This time, Nitadori exclaimed in happiness,

"If it's that hotel, I've been there a few times! That one's amazing, right! The high-rise view's really great!"

"Yeah, it was the mid-winter, so it's a nice scene."

The scenery back then was really great.

Looking down at the white dome roof, I could see the theme park beside it and the streets that continued on. I could see Mount Tsukuba far away, and the lighting decorations which would only appear at that time were really pretty.

I can also see the tallest electrical tower from the glass elevators facing the east, standing tall as if it is the resting place of a final boss in a roleplaying game.

I wondered about the scenery I saw as I answered her, and wondered if Nitadori's family was rich if she was able to stay there a few times.

That hotel was located in the middle of Tokyo, but the flair varied from the usual business hotels. The guest rooms were spacious and luxurious, there were speakers installed in the bathroom, and I could hear the sounds from the television. Speaking of which, it felt more like a resort hotel instead (though I never lived in on).

Was it really fine of me to live there without paying a single cent? This apprehension and excitement rendered me sleepless.

"What about tomorrow? Are you going back after the after record's done?"

Nitadori continued to fire questions at rapid-fire.

To be honest, she really helped me out here. I really was bad at conversing, but simple questions would help me to relax somewhat, and help me out.

"Yeah, the Limited Express and normal tickets come with a return trip, so when there's a trip back, I'll take the free-seating ride back. There are times when I have to hold meetings after the after record's done. During those moments I'll go to the editorial branch at Iidabashi with the editor-in-charge, and then I'll stay for another night."

"I see."

While conversing, the Limited Express stopped at the next stop. 2 passengers entered, one seated rather upfront, while another was seated 5 rows in front of us.

Leaving aside the quiet moments when the train has stopped, I supposed we didn't have to worry about being eavesdropped on once the train began to move.

Once it started moving, Nitadori asked the next question,

"You were staring at some printed materials there. Is it the manuscript of the novel?"

Nitadori's next question was not a difficult one for me to answer.

"Yeah. That's the manuscript for the next volume of 'Vice Versa' that's to be published, though I can't say when."

"Wow...amazing...like an author."

Nitadori clenched her little fists as she said this.

"Well...I am an author thought."

It's rather embarrassing, but I couldn't say that wasn't the case, so I could only answer that way. This definitely is the only time I would describe myself using the 'I'm an author'.

"I can't disturb you then, sensei..."

"It's fine. This isn't that important."

This manuscript doesn't need to be inspected by today.

I had taken this Limited Express countless times, and I did all sorts of things while on the ride. Sometimes, I would check the manuscript like I did on this day Other times, I would be writing on the laptop, or reading a book I brought along.

There were also moments where I would listen to music while viewing the scenery, thinking of new ideas, or emptying my mind.

Either that, or I would do all of these together, or sleep throughout the ride and not do anything.

"Thanks."

For some reason, Nitadori thanked me quietly.

And then,

"Actually, I got some things to do too. I want to read the script thoroughly."

"Oh, I see."

The script obviously referred to the one used for the next day, the second episode of 'Vice Versa'.

"So...I'm going back to another seat later. See you at the studio tomorrow."

Nitadori spoke with a very normal voice. She doesn't seem to feel pity about this, and doesn't seem very happy either.

"Of course, I won't talk to you in the studio, since I'm just a rookie in the voice acting world who's finally able to get a named role. You're the original author of this anime too! How can I be that haughty?"

She then said that. I didn't know whether she was joking or being serious.

I didn't feel that Nitadori and I had that sort of senior-junior relationship, but thinking how it might be serious if anyone's to overhear our conversation at such a close distance, and how difficult it would be to cover up, I said,

"Got it. I won't talk to you in the studio either. There will probably be trouble for us if our secret's discovered, and I'm bad at talking, so I can't hide this."

After hearing this, Nitadori smiled as she narrowed the eyes under the glasses.

"Got it. Are you taking this train next week, sensei?"

I nodded.

"Can I sit beside you if I'm not going to disturb you? I never seen an author before, so I'm very interested in you...I got lots of questions to ask. Can I?"

I had no reason to refuse.

To me, it's a rare experience for me to talk with a girl like Nitadori, even if I'm just answering questions.

I suppose that in the near future, I'll be 'using this experience' for my novel.

But at that moment, do I write it out plainly and get her to agree being the basis of the character, or do I hide her completely?

"Yeah sure. I'm always sitting at this seat in this car."

"Great! Now I can level up and improve my acting!"

"Improve by 'level up'?"

"You're really particular like an author, huh?"

"But...I'm an author."

This was the second time in my life that I said this. Was this exchange going to be a cliché?

"Alright, see you next week then!"

Nitadori's eyes were staring at my face when she said this, but I felt that she was not saying this to me, but to herself instead.

She got up from the seat, pulled her long hair behind, and nodded slightly at me.

"Bye then."

I waved my hand slightly as I watched the black hair of Nitadori's back walk down aisle.

It was embarrassing to watch a girl's back without looking away, so I averted my eyes out of the window when she was halfway past the car.

And then, when I placed the bag that was leaning at my calf onto the seat Nitadori sat on,

"Ah..."

I was suddenly intrigued by something. I didn't ask what sort of role Eri Nitadori was acting as.

Once I knew I missed the chance to hear that, I was suddenly curious about it.

"..."

If Nitadori was still seated in this car, I thought I would want to ask about this. And so, I stood up immediately.

My eyes continued to search hard, but there was no sight of her. I couldn't be chasing her down to the car in front either.

And I sat down.

That night, I found out 3 things at the hotel.

First, the laptop contained the information I got from the producer previously, with the character names and the voice actors listed inside.

Second, Nitadori said that she'll be staying overnight like me, and that she'll be checking the script, but she wasn't carrying any baggage.

Third, the gray suit woman too was nowhere to be seen at her seat when I stood up to look for Nitadori.

The next day was a Friday, April 11th.

I saw Nitadori at the after record of the second episode of the anime 'Vice Versa'.

Not that I 'met Nitadori', but 'saw her' as the words implied.

It was at a certain recording studio in Japan.

The editor-in-charge and I entered the control room at 9.40am, and by then, Nitadori was already inside.

She was dressed in plain clothes that were easy to move it. I heard that voice actors would choose to wear clothes that would not make much sounds if possible.

She tied her long black hair in a bundle to prevent it from being an obstruction.

She continued to greet the senior voice actors that came in as her hair swayed about, her bow akin to a sports club member.

The recording began.

Nitadori practically didn't have a chance to appear.

It was to be expressed. Looking at the time frame, the second episode of the anime was just the beginning of the story, and took up about 30 pages of the original first volume.

The ones with lines were mostly the main characters of 'Vice Versa'. Nitadori's character would not appear at all until the 5th episode.

So why did Nitadori appear?

Could she not appear at the studio like those famous voice actors who didn't have any roles on this day?

After pondering about it, I finally got an answer.

She was present to help act out one or two lines from the unnamed characters, like the protagonist's female classmate, a passer-by woman, and so on. Also, she would be taking part in 'background' scenes where many people would talk.

She was being very attentive no matter whether she was at the chair furthest from the microphone, or during the short scenes she had, never relaxing a little as she gave a serious look.

Her expression was as sharp as a blade, like a 'real Japanese sword'

Luckily, I didn't have a chance to talk to her. I didn't know how I was supposed to converse with her during that situation.

After the 4 hour long recording ended, I had no reason to stay behind.

I greeted the anime supervisor, sound supervisor and producer, and informed them that I intended to depart.

The voice actors too left the studio booth in a single file, greeted the control room briefly, and left.

Before I left, I glanced at the booth, and saw Nitadori greet the departing voice actors, with her hair swaying again.

Chapter 2 – April 17, She Asked Me

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

The black dye forming in my mind spreading quickly and quietly.

At the same time, rain began to fall in the middle of my sights.

This is because, the moment Nitadori yelled, the tears gathered on the inside of the lens fell out.

Inexplicably however, the tears never fell no matter how long it too.

They seemed to linger in the air.

On a closer glance, I found they expanding slowly, very slowly.

But they never fell.

The tears never fell.

That was what I realized in my darkened mind.

At this moment, the flow of time seem to be very slow.

It was the evening of April 17th, the 3rd Thursday of the month.

I entered the Limited Express car.

Passing through the doors, I went towards the exact same seat I took the previous week.

The free-seating carriage was as empty as before, and there were fewer passengers.

I arrived at the platform 20 minutes earlier than before, hoping not to miss the ride, and also to take my favorite seat. While waiting at the platform, I looked left and right, but did not see Nitadori.

But even so, I placed my backpack on the rack the moment I got on; once she came by, I would not have to worry about moving my stuff aside. The carriage was so empty, and I didn't think anyone else would come.

After that, I sat down at the windowside seat.

I then looked at the watch wrapped around my left wrist.

When I first had my first royalty, I thought ‘Maybe I should buy something to commemorate’, and so, I spent 30,000 Yen on this digital watch, and ever since then, I had been wearing this. Or rather, I ad been wearing this watch all this time.

The last time I stared at the display so intently was when I first bought this watch.

The train departed punctually from the station, and nobody came to my side.

On this day, a cold downpour occurred since morning, and so the windowpanes were drenched as it began moving, causing the scenery to look contorted.

On this week, from Monday till Thursday, Nitadori,

Didn't speak to me at school, just as we promised.

It was me who always entered the classroom earlier, and Nitadori would proceed to the seat behind me unwittingly while I was reading or in my delusions.

Once it was class break, I would not turn my head around to speak to her, and she too wouldn't talk to me either.

Speaking of which, I was hardly in the classroom during class break. I would either head to the toilet, or I would find a place to stroll nonchalantly for no particular reason.

During lunch, I would have my own meal in the school cafeteria, and then stay in the library until class ended.

After school, I would head home immediately, as quickly as possible to read books, watch anime and movies, or write my novel.

The train got faster, and the raindrops flowed down the window.

The seat beside me remained empty.

“Maybe I should get to work...”

I muttered. I couldn't recall when was it that I first described my actions as ‘work’. Though I had no experience in working part-time, I was already spouting the word work like others.

I stood up to pick up my bag, intending to retrieve the items from within.

And at that moment, the automatic doors behind me opened.

“Yo! Sensei!”

Someone spoke up to me from behind.

Despite hearing only the voice, I knew who it was before I even turned around.

And so, I moved my hands away from my bag.

Nitadori had a bag with her on this day.

It was brown, an old looking travel bag with wheels attached to it. Nitadori pulled it as she let it roll, and placed it horizontally at the seat behind me.

She was holding a bag of goods purchased from the convenience store.

I could see through the bag. It contained two bags of potato chips and a 500ml PET bottle of tea.

“Here!”

She said as she handed it to me, and so, I did not take my backpack, picking the plastic bag instead. Trying my best not to touch her hands, I managed to grab the bag skilfully, a rarity at that.

I sat down beside the window. Like the previous week, Nitadori had her hair tidied in a bundle, letting it drape down her right shoulder as she sat down.

“It’s been a week, sensei, though I’ve been seeing your back every day.”

This greeting certainly was weird, but it was fact.

“It’s been a week. Though...I do sense your stare every day.”

I put the plastic bag on my thighs and did my best to answer.

“Did you feel my hot, passionate stare?”

And that reply came with a smile.

Seeing her act like that, I continued to try my best,

“Yeah, I do. I felt...a burning feeling on my back.”

“Oh? You’re good. Do you then understand what’s it about?”

“What do you mean? ‘Hey! Add more appearances for Meek!’”

“Correct!”

Meek is a supporting character in ‘Vice Versa’.

She’s a ‘homonculus’ created by an alchemist; in other words, an artificial human.

Since it is a fictitious story, the characters are typically very pretty, and the homonculus in particular are designed to have ‘extraordinary pretty’.

And so, the unique characteristic the homonculus have is heterochromia; in other words, they have different colored eyes.

The colors differ amongst the homonculus, and in Meek's case, her right eyes is wine red, while her left's yellow. Her hair's blond and short.

Her exotic clothes are such that it bares lesser skin, and there's a green muffler wrapped around her neck.

Nitadori Eri, the girl with long black hair sitting beside me now, was acting as her voice.

I wanted to ask her about something.

And after 3 seconds of choosing my words,

“Nitadori, about ‘Vice Versa’...how much have you read?”

I asked tentatively.

I didn't go straight to the point and ask her ‘did you read it?’ Instead, I said ‘how much have you read’. Even I found myself pathetic here.

I did hear from somewhere that when acting in an anime that has original work, some would read the entire work, and some wouldn't read the work at all.

The former group wanted to understand the world setting and the characters they're portraying, even if it's a little, and understand the parts that were omitted from the script (however, there are some characters that were completely different from how they were in the original work as compared to the anime script).

The latter group were the opposite, thinking that the script (screenplay) they have is everything for the anime, and deliberately chose not to touch the original work so that they would not sense any difference from the original work.

Of course, there are those who feel that it's time-taxing to read all of the original work. A manga would be one thing, but reading 9 volumes of a light novel series is not that easy.

“Well, I didn't read all of the original work, you know?”

If Nitadori were to answer like that, I would probably feel nothing but heartfelt disappointment, and I wouldn't have confidence in continuing the conversation.

But even so, the reason why I deliberately asked that question was,

I wanted to know how much we knew in common when I talk to her If she did read the original work, there's something we can both talk about.

In conclusion, her response was,

“I read all 9 volumes! They're interesting!”

She answered without a moment's hesitation, in a matter-of-fact manner, continuing by saying the words an author would be most delighted with.

"Th—"

I was unable to continue on,

"Th?"

Nitadori tilted her head slightly as she listened to me.

Taking a steady breath, I blurted out what was on my mind,

"Thanks."

Nitadori let a little gasp, and expressed her thoughts,

"Likewise, sensei."

'Vice Versa'.

Typically, this term would be used at the end of a sentence, with an 'and' added in front. The meaning of this is 'the opposite of the preceding statement holds true'.

For example,

"I hate him and vice versa."

The meaning of this English line would be,

"I hate him, and he too hates me."

This is a very colloquial mainly used in conversations, so normally, it goes like this,

"I hate that guy, and I guess we both hate each other."

"I hate that guy, but I guess that guy feels the same towards me."

Well, that seems to be how it goes.

This lines didn't seem like it was English to begin with, and actually, it wasn't; it was originally from Latin, it seemed.

I learned of this English expression when I was a Middle School student. It was not taught in English class, and neither did it appear in the textbooks; I saw it in the library, on the title of a slightly old American movie.

If I have to describe ‘Vice Versa’ in one line, it would be ‘the story of one summoned to a foreign world’.

The submitted work, which ended up as the summary of the first volume, is as followed,

The protagonist’s a boy born in modern Japan.

His name is ‘Shin Tsumizono 摘園真’. Naturally, the name’s derived from the meaning of ‘Vice Versa’, ‘the opposite of the preceding statement holds true’.²

Shin’s a docile high school boy, and lived in a certain town of a certain prefecture where the mountains could be viewed. He grew up with a girl called ‘Yui’, and lived a very peaceful high school life with a few good friends amicably.”

But on a certain day, he felt a mysterious music seemingly ringing in his mind, and he was suddenly transported to a different world.

This world, certainly not Earth, was called ‘Reputation’. There were 5 moons in the sky, and a belt of light surrounding the planet.

Magic naturally existed in this world, and there were also all sorts of creatures, including species like elves and dwarves.

Shin, not knowing what was going on, met a boy who resembled him greatly.

That boy was the other protagonist, ‘Sin’.³

Sin was so similar to Shin that they were practically twins, but he had such a contrasting personality, for he’s feisty, and had an amazing amount of combat ability.

Sin is a prince of one of the kingdoms existing in the chaos roaming this world. His father had recently passed away, and he inherited the throne at a young age.

For the survival of his country, Sin fought on, at the same time harboring a dream of finally uniting the world and allowing all to live in peace.

In the history of Reputation, the ‘two great kings’ once fought a battle for supremacy. The winner of the war ‘true king (self-proclaimed)’ ruled his world. Several hundred years passed, and the true king (self-proclaimed) had vanished somewhere. His authority lost its luster, and the world was in chaos again.

Unfortunately for him, Shin arrived in this warring era that was filled with bloodshed. In his very first battle, he died easily.

² 真 means truth.

³ Original has it as シン, using Sin here to distinguish between the two.

And then, he revived.

In this world, Shin had immortality, and was able to revive over and over again.

No matter what sort of damage his body took, in other words, his head lopped off, his body burned, or blown into gibs by bombs, his flesh and blood would gather again, and he would revive.

Sin was particularly interested in Shin, and thought of using the latter.

Shin had no intention of getting involve in such fights and getting himself killed, but upon realizing that there were no other ways to live on or return to his world, he colluded with Sin.

Sin's little sister was a pretty girl called Ema with a similar face to the duo, and Shin, working together with their gathering of beautiful maids cum bodyguards and macho looking warrior subordinates, spent his days dying over and over again in these turbulent times.

Soon after, they took on a powerful enemy country.

The young general of the neighboring country, Pluto, led his forces to attack Sin's country.

In this battle that concerned the survival of the country, Shin learned of Sin's thoughts and determination, understanding that the latter's a kind person in nature who hated war more than anyone else. And so, he decided to summon all his courage and work together with Sin.

It was the final battle.

Shin acted as Sin's decoy, and deliberately led himself to be caught.



The former was easily revealed to be an impostor, and was killed. As according to plan, he revived, escaped, caused chaos on the battlefield, and at the very end, Shin took on Pluto himself.

No matter how many times he died, Shin continued to fight and pester Pluto. Once Shin realized that the handsome Pluto was actually a pretty girl dressed as a male, he seized the opportunity and won.

And so, Shin and Sin managed to fight back the enemy forces, saving the country.

While Sin, the leader of the country, and Ema were wondering about how they should repay Shin, Shin heard the music that led him to this world, and realized that he could return to his own world.

When leaving Reputation, Shin suavely left these words to the boy who resembled him,

“You owe me a favor, Sin!”

When he returned back to modern Japan, he found that nary a second had passed.

Having returned safely from the vanished world and time, Shin wondered if that was just a dream, But even so, he was able to feel proud about being able to summon his courage.

And then, he ran off to the friends calling him name.

The end.

Or so it seemed, but it didn't end here.

After flipping a few pages, there's the stinger,

A few days later, after school, Shin was on his way to play with Yui and his friends,

“Where's this place!?”

Only to find a fully armed Sin suddenly appearing in front of him in modern Japan.

And then, he saw Shin's face.

The 1st volume ended here, and the story was to be continued the 2nd volume.

‘Vice Versa has sold 9 volumes’.

The odd numbered volumes are called ‘Side Shin’, and the even numbered volumes are called ‘Side Sin’.

These terms was originally used by the editor-in-charge and me for convenience sake, and soon after, it's used in the introductory synopsis. Right now, these terms are widely used by the readers themselves.

A little off-topic, but since both of them didn't sound different, we would call 'Side Shin' as 'Side Makoto' instead.

In the odd numbered volumes, Shin would be brought over to Regulation to fight, and the story's serious and bloody.

In the even numbered volumes, Sin would be brought over to modern Japan, causing all sorts of ruckus, and the story's comedic.

In the second volume, once Sin, who arrived in Japan, was spotted by Shin's friends, the latter had a brainwave, and came up with a setting of him 'being a guy who likes to cosplay as Middle Ages era characters, and being a long estranged cousin who has such uncanny resemblance both of them were often thought of as twins'.

And so, Sin was nearly arrested by the police for violating the firearms control law, and was completely astounded by all sorts of things in modern Japan like cars, buildings and trains. He tried to look into the distance, and climbed up the high voltage electrical poles quickly, only to be electrocuted and fell to his death.

And then, he revived.

If this were to keep up, Sin would probably end up committing a robbery to survive, and so Shin decided to bring him home.

Though they met Shin's mother very quickly,

"Since we're cousins, I guess I have no choice here."

His open-minded mother, for some reason, agreed to allow Sin to live with them.

And so, Sin lived together with Shin in Japan, not knowing what to do to get back to Japan.

In conclusion, he solved the problems surrounding Shin through some relatively forceful methods.

And at the end of the 2nd volume, when Shin bid farewell to a vanishing Sin,

"You owe me a favor, Shin!"

And so, the volume ended in a completely different situation from the 1st volume.

In the 3rd volume, Shin again returned to Regulation.

In the 4th volume, Sin again returned to Japan. This time, he had Ema with him, who just so happened to hold his hand.

And the story of seriousness and comedy repeated over and over again.

It may be a little too much for me to say this,

No, I understand this better than anyone else, for I'm the one who wrote this.

'Vice Versa's an over-the-top story.

It includes a Middle Age era fantasy, all sorts of monsters, flashy magic, mysterious science and mecha, battles and wars, journeys, friendship, cute moe girls, characters with many aspects of personalities, the burning friendship between guys, Machiavellian schemes of politicians, mystery plots involving identical looks, immortality, sexy situations, gags, tear-jerking episodes, tragic farewells, peaceful school life, cynical irrationality, otaku episodes,

I basically crammed all the interesting elements I saw in the novels, manga, anime and movies I saw into this work.

The idea of letting the protagonists switch between Reputation and Japan was an answer I derived when thinking about how to convey all these aspects.

Upon hearing those words,

"Now that's cunning of you."

The editor-in-charge gave me such praise.

We're inside the Limited Express.

And after I expressed my thanks because she read my work,

"Likewise, sensei."

Nitadori gave me this answer, and then continued on,

"Anyway, that's how it is. Do you want some snacks?"

I didn't know what she meant by 'that's how it is', but Nitadori gently lifted the plastic bag that was on my lap.

"Please prepare a table."

I did as I was told, and pulled the table from the seat handrail.

I would usually place my stuff on my lap when checking the scripts and using the laptop, so this is the first time I'm using the table.

Nitadori placed the two bottles of tea and the salted seaweed potato chips on my table.

“It’s a token of thanks from me.”

“Ah...thanks. I was feeling a little hungry, so thanks for helping me with that...I guess?”

“Don’t worry about it. I want to have some too, and it’s thanks for being willing to continue talking with me. Just think of it as *katusdon* in the interrogation room.

“I see. You said that you got a lot of questions to ask me, right?”

Even if there’s no katsudon, I’m still willing to answer all your questions (Off topic, but in fact, the police won’t give any katsudon when interrogating others, and if orders were placed, it seems the suspects will have to pay for themselves).

Even so, since Nitadori provided me with a gift, I’ll just accept it without thinking too much.

With this, I guess the excuse of answering lots of questions because I accepted sweets is established.

I held the ends to open the bag of potato chips,

“I really like salted Seaweed.”

And expressed my honest thoughts.

Even since I was young, salted seaweed flavor’s my favorite for potato chips, and I like it to the point of being unwilling to take other flavors.

“I like it too.”

Nitadori’s brief words really shocked me, and I nearly dropped the bag.

Wait. Don’t be mistaken. That’s definitely not what she meant. I tried convincing myself this.

I crisply open this bag of potato chips that’s slightly bloated due to the atmospheric pressure of this town.

And then, I thought of something.

“What about horse sashimi flavor?”

There’s a souvenir shop located next to the departure platform selling such flavored chips, though they aren’t potato chips. As they’re souvenirs, they’re a little more pricey.

Having asked this question, I look over at Nitadori, and she turned her glasses towards me with a serious look.

"I did hear of the rumors before, and I did try it. It's nice, but I must say that it's different from real horse sashimi. I don't want to dabble in such trivial stuff of whether such a thing can be considered as such, and I don't think I'm the one to decide this. Now then—who can it be?"

In response to this overly serious and pretentious declaration, I ponder seriously, and say,

"...Erm. The horse sashimi god?"

"Understood. When I take Gonsuke out for a walk the next time, I'll ask him if I meet him."

"Meet him, really? While walking?"

"No, I haven't met him yet. But well, it doesn't matter what my mystery experience is like. More importantly, please tell me more about being a writer like what I said last week, and help me level up here."

"Understood...but your Japanese's a little weird."

"You're really particular like an author."

"I'm an author."

After eating 4 pieces of potato chips and drinking two gulps of tea that was provided,

"Now then, do you mind explaining?"

My interrogation began in this Limited Express carriage.

I don't know whether Nitadori was adjusting her glasses as an act, or something else altogether.

"Understood. I'll answer all of your questions."

And so, I told her as manly as I could. If I can do it, I'll do it.

"But I don't really have a clear answer other than the overly private stuff, so except for the private matters regarding other people and what I definitely can't reveal in my work..."

And then, I answered in a wimpy manner. If I can't do it, I won't do it.

"Understood."

The glasses girl who loved horse sashimi smiled as she said this,

"Now then, as for what I wanna ask today,"

"Eh? Today?"

“But we only have 2 and a half hours, right? That’s why I decided on a theme every week. There are other things I want to ask next week.”

“...”

“You ate some of my potato chips, right? Actually, a chip’s worth a week of questions.”

“...”

I silently reached my hand out for the 5th piece.

I continued to crunch the 6th and 7th piece of chips.

“Ah, do you want some?”

But after realizing that I can’t be the only one eating all these, I turn the bag of chips over to Nitadori.

“Thanks. I don’t need it now. I’ll wait till I’m hungry later. You can finish it all yourself.”

Even if she said so, I didn’t intend to finish it myself, and sealed the bag tightly to avoid letting the chips sog, and placed it in the plastic bag.

I wiped my hands with a handkerchief, took a gulp of tea, and said,

“Now then...go ahead.”

“I apologize...if the question’s too rude, and please remind me of that.”

Nitadori started off with these words,

“What kind of lifestyle do you have?”

And asked the first question.

I can’t see it, but it seemed I showed quite the shocked look.

“Ah, sorry, it’s too crude...”

Nitadori frantically added on,

“Well, when I first did the After Record, I was really, really shocked there! ‘Vice Versa’s really interesting, and it’s my first time voicing a named character, so I always wondered what sort of person the author is. But when I searched through the internet, I found the author’s real face to be a complete mystery, and some think that the author may be a female...”

Well, it's normal for her to be shocked. I thought. Till this point, I've been shocking the people I met at work.

There was once when I went with the editor-in-charge to meet the anime personnel.

“Oh? You brought your son along?”

And that was what they said to the editor-in-charge.

“And well, I was really shocked to find that person seated in front of me in the classroom during the new semester, so much that my heart and lungs practically stopped...I didn't know how I would end up if the self-introduction continued...”

“Ah...well, I see. I understand since I was shocked too.”

It's only till this point that I realized it was a good thing for me not to turn my head around immediately.

“So first, I want to ask, what sort of childhood did you have, sensei? When did you start reading books? When did you start writing books? How did you think of so many stories and characters.”

I understood what she wanted to. Basically, she wanted to know about me up till this point.

“Understood. Those questions are fine.”

Once I said that, I felt the brown eyes behind those glasses glowing.

As for the first memories I had in my life, I didn't answer them because I didn't want to.

I didn't think there's a need for that.

That's why I answered Nitadori using the next impression I had in life.

“I've...been reading books ever since I was young.”

“When did it start?”

“Hm, well, I got to tell you something before this...I only have a single parent, raised by my mother. If mum didn't tell me about it, I wouldn't have known who my dad is, and whether he's alive or not.”

“...”

After seeing Nitadori suddenly scowl and quiet down,

“But it's to be expected for me. The people around me, including my classmates knew of this, so it's nothing to hide. Don't worry about it.”

I then continued on as per normal, and she nodded slightly,

“I understand...were you always reading books alone since young, sensei?”

I nodded.

I only have a single mother in my family.

I never knew why I was born, as my mother never told me so.

Of course, I never thought of myself as a child of God.

At this point, it's pointless for me to know, and so I never ask; never will I intend to ask.

I heard that my mother's mother, my maternal grandmother, died when I was 2, and my maternal grandfather died earlier. In other words, my mother and I—

Have no relatives at all.

My mother has been working as a nurse for a long time, and because of this, she never once got retrenched. Our family's not rich, but it's not to a point where we can't survive without relying on others.

But as mom's always deployed at different hospitals, we'll move to apartments located near them. I lived in a few places in this prefecture.

I like reading books. I can't think of when it began, and what started it, but what I can remember in my childhood was that I spent all the time reading books by myself.

I was either reading books at home, or at the childcare centers, or at the libraries in my elementary school.

I started reading picture books, and then went on to children books, and then to children literature. I suppose that when I was in 4th grade, I read through all the books in my school's library.

I really like to read books, and anything goes as long as I have books. I never thought of doing anything else.

And because of that, I practically had no friends.

There are classmates I sometimes interact with in school, but there aren't any friends who would ask me out to play after school or invite me to their houses.

This is because I kept transferring schools, coupled with my introverted personality, and more important—

“I felt happier reading books, treating them as toys...”

“Treating them as toys?”

Nitadori tilted her head, as the term implied.

This was to be expected.

There's a definite need to explain this.

“What I mean by ‘treating them as toys’ is...”

To play with the books.

To play with my delusions.

There was no way the young me could imagine characters, settings and conversations right from scratch.

And so, after reading a book, I'll read it again.

When reading it again, I'll understand the scenes in the book, imagining the images in my mind. I'll then destroy them as I please and reset them accordingly to what I like.

For example, I'll turn a tragedy into a complete opposite, a comedy.

And I'll turn all the characters that appeared in a comedy to die unnatural deaths in a tragedy.

That was how I started off playing with the characters.

Once I got proficient at it, I started to increase the number of characters. That would be myself.

I would immerse myself in the world of the book, beat all the characters that debuted inside it, and prove my strength.

I could play with this up till 10 times in a book. I would rewrite the setting every single time, until I got addicted to it.

That's the ‘role play’ kind of game. Every kid had done it.

I'll use dolls for girls, and for boys, I would insert myself as a hero.

However, I used books for this case.

“I see...”

After hearing the explanation, Nitadori seemed impressed, saying,

“In other words, you’ve always been reading books and having imaginations since young, sensei.”

“Yeah. I prefer the term ‘delusions’ however, so I’ll express it as ‘delusions’. That’s about the same meaning.”

I feel that ‘imaginations’ give a more elegant vibe, while ‘delusions’ give a vibe of ‘doing foolish things’, and I prefer this nuance.

“How were your grades in elementary school?”

“I think I did decent other than P.E. I like reading books, so this includes textbooks. From the start of the new school semester, I read through the textbooks over and over again. On a side note, I do like reading dictionaries too.”

“I see.”

“And then, during 5th grade, there’s something that undoubtedly changed my life. Without that incident, I’ll never have the current me.”

That really did affect my life greatly, and I blurted it honestly.

“Wh-what exactly is it?”

Nitadori asked with a serious face. She’s like a journalist here, just without a notepad in her hands.

Just when I intended to answer, the train conductor came by. It’s a middle aged man this time, and after briskly checking the Limited Express tickets Nitadori and I had, he departed.

“Erm—”

I continued on,

“My mom decided to move houses. For my sake.”

It happened during Spring, when I was promoting from 4th grade to 5th grade.

My mother suddenly decided to move houses.

There was no change in her workplace location, she just wanted to move houses for my sake.

She wanted to move to a place 20km away from our original house.

The new apartment was located right beside the largest library in the area.

If I could be right beside a large library, that might that—

I could read all the books to my heart's content from henceforth. The collection of books in the school library far pales in comparison to it.

I was really happy when I heard about it. Though I had to transfer school again, it really didn't matter to me.

Mom had a lot more overtime work as a result, and that in turn caused me to be really troubled—
Actually, I was too happy to even think about that.

"Ever since then, I was always at 3 places, my apartment room, the elementary school, and the library. The library really was great, because, to put it, I didn't have to buy books!"

I just hope that all the readers would buy my books ever since I became an author however. I never expressed this thought to Nitadori, especially since even I thought it was selfish.

"Your mother's really amazing! You've been reading non stop ever since then, right, sensei...?"

"I was reading, playing."

Feeling parched after saying all this, I dowsed myself with some tea.

The library contained books many elementary school libraries did not contain. Or I would say, they contained those kinds of books.

In other words, there were a lot more adult oriented books, and my choice of books increased instantly.

The typical detective novels prior to this were mostly about Arsène Lupin and Sherlock Holmes, but at that point, I could obtain detective novels that were more adult oriented.

I hungrily devoured the detective-themed books written by famous Japanese authors.

These books were typically written for adults, so there were some rather erotic scenes written within.

Unable to understand the prose, I read them with my heart pounding. I would wonder if anyone would have noticed what I was reading if they approached me from behind.

The library had mangas which the school library didn't have.

Of course, they were those famous works, and it really was an opportunity for me, who had no chance to read them. With the chance to obtain these classic works, I understood the joy of reading manga.

There were also many of the so called light novels in the library, and I had the chance to be introduced to them.

At first, I did not particularly notice the differences between a light novel and other kinds of books. I didn't remember how it was back then, but it's not a rarity nowadays to see a light novel with a cover illustration.

But as light novels occupied one entire bookstore, I merely assumed them to be another type of book, and started looking from the catchy looking titles.

After browsing through, I found that light novels could be said to be novels similar to manga; There were lots of illustrations, and the plotlines were similar.

At this age, I, like other people, started off attracted by the 'cute female character drawing' at first. Thus, I started reading them happily, and played with them.

I could also watch movies in the library.

The library had DVDs for borrowing, and I could either bring them home to watch, or to watch in the library.

I feel that in terms of 'enjoying a story', both books and movies are the same. I got addicted to movies after watching a few of them. Like mangas, I did check out a few classic works on the shelves.

And ever since I began watching movies, I started watching television, which I watched infrequently back then, just to watch the movies.

Of course, it wasn't to a point of reducing my reading time, but watching movies inspired me to watch anime often.

The me right now really like watching anime, and this includes all genres. It was only near the end of my 6th grade that I began to watch them religiously (or record them to avoid missing out). I even rewatched the recordings and watch anime to enjoy the stories.

After hearing my explanation till this point, Nitadori looked very impressed.

"Hm."

Looking solemn, she mused,

"In other words...your mother moved houses to give you gifted education?"

"Ahaha, I guess."

I gave an honest smile, and continued,

“The types of books I could read and marvel at increased, and as a result, I had more time playing with those works. I forgot when it started, but I was able to come up with delusions even if I’ve yet to finish a book, like before I sleep, when I shower, or when I’m in class.”

“You can’t do that in class!?”

Nitadori chortled, her tone clearly the opposite of what she said, and she continued,

“I got a question, sensei. Do you play video games?”

“Practically not. The first time I tried it was during early elementary school. I borrowed a game from someone at the childcare center, and it was interesting, but—”

“But?”

“I was horrible at it. Very. I just couldn’t play well no matter how I tried, and I couldn’t play to the point where it got interesting, which really puts a dampener on me. I was rather interested in role-play games or adventure games with interesting stories...but I just felt that games were still inferior to books.”

“I see, I see.”

The Limited Express raced through a few stations in the rain.

The passengers increased in the number, but the tour group passengers were having a commotion, so we could continue with our conversation as normal.

“So sensei, it’s because you had such a childhood that you were able to have all sorts of imaginations.”

After learning of my past, Nitadori asked me about a question, ‘the major decision I made in my life’.

“When did you decide to begin writing a novel?”

The editor-in-charge did ask the same question Nitadori did. My answer wouldn’t change with time, and I just had to answer her.

“I decided to do so in 8th grade.”

I managed to graduate successfully from 8th grade.

I suppose I transferred schools 5 times in those 6 years. Of course, I had no friends at all.

I became a middle school student, studying at the middle school near the library.

With the school nearby, it meant that I had a shorter travel distance. This really helped me out in Middle School.

If anyone were to ask me if there were any changes upon entering middle school, I would say none, at first.

Just a little growth spurt, and a change of voice.

Nothing else changed however. I couldn't make any friends, and I was just living my life reading books, watching movies, anime, and having delusions.

"Ah, I studied too!"

"Very good."

At this point, the stories I had in my delusions ended up forming in the real world.

In other words, a delusion of me being active in the book's world ends up with me being some amazing guy in the real world, able to do anything. (I can't really remember when exactly I became like that though.)

For example,

A terrorist attacked my Middle school, killed the teachers, and took the students hostage. I managed to deal with it easily though, and I had the fantasy of such a story appearing in Hollywood.

When I look outside the window during class—

"The terrorists are hiding in that milk truck! We can't let those guys enter the school!"

I had such grandeur delusions countless times.

And when I shared these delusions as a joke with other authors at the end-of-year party,

"I once had such things too,ahaha."

And they looked surprised, answering,

"Eh? —there are people who don't do that?"

That was when I learned that everyone did that sort of thing.

But the delusions of 'making myself a cool and amazing protagonist'—

Suddenly stopped once I got to 8th grade.

"Why—did something happen at that time?"

The interviewer Nitadori asked me.

The bespectacled face immediately approached me, and I retreated my body back.

“Well...to put it simply, I learned of my own limit.”

“Ah?”

“Actually, I realized that if I’m to keep it up...I won’t be able to be the protagonist.”

“Hm? I still don’t understand.”

My delusions till this point are all centered around ‘myself’.

No matter which story is it, I’ll appear and show off in them.

I can do whatever I want within the story, beat any enemy, escape any crisis, solve any mysterys, and become friends with pretty girls (though I was just thinking about pleasant things, not to the point of lovers).

Once I got to 8th grade however, I realized my limits, the limits I have in the real world.

I’m not good at sports, and my grades in school weren’t excellent.

Furthermore, I’m not good at making friends. I never made any in the past, so this is to be expected.

I can’t try to make any girl happy even if I tried talking to me. In any case, I was unable to converse with someone of the opposite gender normally.

I never had quarrels with others, and I don’t want to; if that were to happen, I guess I’ll definitely lose.

After looking at myself in the real world objectively—

I couldn’t find myself becoming any kind of hero even in my free delusions.

I could no longer let myself be the protagonist. It’s depressing and down-heartening, but that was what I had to recognize.

So, did the delusions end?

Not at all. The opposite, in fact,

“My delusions escalated further from then on.”

“Escalate...?”

Nitadori repeated what I just said.

And then, she went silent.

The train went around a curb, causing a large jolt. The forces were pressing at me from the side and below.

Looking outside the window, I could see the deformed green leaves pass by in the rain,

“I can somewhat understand, but...”

Nitadori said, and I turn my face back to hers.

This pretty bespectacled girl who loves horse sashimi and is a year younger than me stared at me earnestly,

“You started creating ‘characters that aren’t yourself, right?’

And she mentioned the correct answer so concisely.

In 8th grade, I gave up on myself in my delusions, gave up on being the me that would most probably be just a pathetic character.

Instead, I chose to let others take the roles.

That was the turning point.

I no longer thought ‘I can’t do this’.

Instead, I decided, ‘this character’s able to do these’.

Using that example of ‘terrorists invading school vs the students’,

I’ll no longer be in the school.

Instead, I’ll be high above, like the heavens, creating a character created by the god,

“A Middle School boy who was raised and trained by an old man in the neighborhood who was an ex-JSDF special forces commander, and ended up having combat training every day’.

And then I’ll dump this character to the school.

He, living a plain, normal life, sprang to action the moment he heard gunshots, and unleashed the hidden power—this setting will make for a great convenience.

I decided to use ‘the him who’s able to jump up to the second floor’ and replace ‘the me who can’t even jump onto a box. No matter how much the terrorists will change their plans or even take hostages, they’ll definitely be wiped out.

And so, once I created ‘a character capable of being a protagonist’, my delusions increased exponentially.

I became adept at creating all sorts of scenarios to fit the characters.

For example, when a pursued protagonist finds a motorbike in front of him and a subway station, if it’s me, I’ll check to see if I have enough spare change to buy a ticket as I head down.

As the protagonist will be riding on a bike however (as it was written), he’ll leap onto a bike gallantly, and start the engines. As for why the key’s on the bike, I have no idea.

Once I ‘fired myself’ like this, there was a sudden change in the situation, like a creature living in the sea migrating to the land—

This world of delusions that will continue to grow just keeps growing (though in fact, the seas encompasses more area as compared to the land.)

“I see...! That’s really interesting!”

Nitadori was truly impressed, stretching her white tender hands to clap for me.

“Th-thank, you.”

I thanked her, and added on,

“During this time...since I fired myself, there’s a need for another important change.”

Her eyes peering through the glasses, she stared back at me,

“What kind of change?”

In 8th grade, I began creating characters while giving up on ‘making myself the protagonist’, and the number of characters I could create increased exponentially.

It would be an awkward matter to have a modern Japanese middle student and terrorist fighter be the same character as a prince using swordsmanship and magic in a fantasy world.

Even the enemies, allies and other side characters increased in numbers.

And I created more heroines and protagonists (or else there wasn’t any way to make the protagonist popular, and a ‘harem setting’ can’t be established).

In that case, it’ll be difficult for me to keep remembering the number of characters I created through my brain alone.

I found that even if I continued to make the same delusions, there are still some things I’ll forget.

That'll be a waste of the characters I created with much work. It's fun creating new characters, but I still do wish to preserve the characters I like.

And so, I decided to record them down outside my brain.

Where?

There weren't many options. Back then, I decided to write them down in my notebook, handwritten.

I bought a college notebook at the convenience store diagonally opposite my middle school, and within it, I wrote down—

I wrote down the names of the characters I created, their personalities, their weapons and the names, their favorite foods, and their signature quotes.

And so, my 'delusion notebook' was born

That was the first time I converted the world of delusions, in my head till that point, into words.

Till this day, I still remember the moment when I wrote down the words on the notebook cover,

"My Warld the number first"

That was the moment of me taking a small step towards being a future prospective author.

It was two weeks later when I realized that the word 'world' was written wrongly, and I didn't know what 'number first' meant.

The next day, I bought a second notebook, and wrote in hiragana, 'my world, 2nd volume',

Nitadori was laughing so hard she was breathless,

She continued to laugh, trying her best not to disturb the other passengers,



“Ah, so nice.”

And I slowly drank some tea. Soon, the bottle of tea offered to me was empty.

There’s a bottle of water in my backpack, but that’s a drink I can’t buy from anywhere, and it’s water I need for medication. In other words, that’s my emergency supply of water, so I decided not to open it.

Once the commotion caused by Nitadori finally calmed down, the cart selling goods in the train arrived, so I bought some tea.

The train entered the tunnel, and the carriage car became really noisy,

“Ah...so interesting...I never laughed this hard in so many dozen years! Thanks!”

Nitadori said emotionally.

I retorted in my mind how old are you anyway?, and answered,

“Sure, I guess.”

“Ahh, I’m crying. I thought my contacts were about to slip out...”

“Eh?”

I tilted my head, and Nitadori gave a wry smile, saying,

“Ah, oh wait! I forgot that I switched to glasses already...”

She frantically tapped the sides of her glasses with her fingertips.

“Is your head alright...?”

“Wh-whose fault do you think it is?”

I was about to immediately answer ‘it’s me’, but I changed my mind a little.

I thought she could at least take a little joke. I was originally inapt at saying succh things to girls, but I decided to give it a try,

“I guess...it’s probably ‘my world’.”

“Pfft!!”

And while waiting for Nitadori to recover, I continued to guzzle down potato chips and tea.

The Limited Express continued to stop at a few stations.

After about midway through the ride, the passengers didn't increase as much as I thought it would. It was already dark outside the window, and the rain continued to pour,

Nitadori said,

"I understand the process that you started off enjoying your own imaginations, and then you gave yourself up, added the characters, and recorded all your imaginations. You're really good at explaining, sensei."

"Th-thanks."

This was the first time someone praised me like this.

"You told me about this because I wanted to know, so I should be the one thanking, thanks—now then, how did you start from this opportunity to begin writing light novels? When did you begin? Since you submitted a script for a contest and published books, you did finish the work; were you able to write it so fluently right from the beginning, or did you have difficulty? How many times did you submit entries for the newcomer award? Why did you choose Dengeki Bunko?"

And after the thanks, it was a rapid-fire of questions,

It's not difficult for me to answer, but I probably won't be able to remember all the questions.

I have to answer them all properly, in order.

First off—

Why did I actually convert my imaginations into words and write a novel? And when did it began?

To answer these questions,

"Erm, I just feel that no matter how many delusions there are, and how many settings I create and record in the notebook, those can't form a novel."

I first started off with these. It was to be expected; Nitadori nodded,

"And also, I feel that a lot of people simply end things off at this phase...I just feel that there are many more people who 'want to be authors, but simply stopped at the imagination', than those who 'aimed to be authors', and actually created some form of work."

Nitadori remained silent as she gave a frighteningly serious look, nodding slightly a few times.

"There are some who actually didn't write anything, just thinking 'I hope to be an author in the future'. I don't intend to say however that these guys are really useless, that they're just wasting their time."

Till this point, I still chose my words properly.

“This is because I can’t belittle the past me now that I become an author. I feel that any person will have an egg within them, just that the time they will hatch differ.”

I felt that I was being too pretentious, but I really can’t think of any other good examples, so I was left without any other option.

“But to be an author, it is a necessary step to ‘actually write your own story. Using that example from just now, it’s basically trying to break an egg open from the inside.”

I said as I looked back at myself, 4 years ago.

“I feel that the opportunity and time to begin writing novels differ amongst people. To be honest, I really don’t know how others do it, but I do clearly remember my situation back then...”

After ending off with this opening, I proceed to answer Nitadori’s very first question,

“I began converting my delusion notebook into writing, and worked hard in actually trying to create a work. It was—4 months after I first used the delusion notebook, and I remember very well that it was during my summer vacation in 8th grade.”

Nitadori brought her face forward. This girl really has the habit of bringing her face forward whenever she’s asking the questions.

“And that opportunity?”

I answered,

“When I obtained my weapons.”

To be an author, there were 2 weapons I needed.

Of course, the first would be the imaginations I managed to develop from reading since young and my delusions.

The other would be the weapon for writing, the computer.

During summer 3 years ago, when I was 14 years old, my mother wanted to buy something for me.

It was only during my birthday and Christmas that I could ask for something a little more exorbitant.

“Back then, I merely asked mom for books that were a little more pricey than normal...”

But that was the only year that was different. I told mom that I wanted a notebook computer, just the cheapest kind would do.

Mom rejected my request, probably thinking that I just wanted to surf the internet alone at home. Prior to that moment, I learned how to use the computers in the neighboring library since 6th grade, as they had internet access, and I could check for books online and read the reviews.

However, there was a child lock in the library computers, and there's a time limit for use.

I guess mom was worried that I would get engrossed to the internet, that I would lock myself in the room, addicted to it or online games, and not go to school.

At first, mom said that a computer was expensive, and wouldn't buy one for me. Back then, I didn't have a cellphone.

Thus, I stated my actual thoughts.

I didn't need a network. The proof was that I agreed not to request for internet access. If I really needed it no matter what, I would head to the library next door like before.

I want to write a novel, I want to write one through a computer and a software that could manage my folders.

Having read through so many books, that was the point where I wanted to try writing for myself.

“And then...your mother’s reaction was?”

Nitadori clearly knew the result, but she asked with a tentative look.

“She brooded over the issue for a few days, before finally agreeing to it.”

“Ohh! Congratulations!”

“I really was happy about it. Of course, I thought that since people in the past wrote their novels on writing paper, I could do it too if I put in the effort.”

While still respecting those who composed their stories hand written, I still wanted to continue on,

“But I feel that there’s a difference in efficiency between handwriting and typing on the computer, and I’m not wrong to think this way. Ever since I became an author, I heard a lot of things about other authors, but I have never heard anyone say that they composed novels handwritten till this point.”

“I see. So the opportunity that came for you wasn’t a psychological one, sensei, but a physical one, huh...”

Nitadori succinctly summarized everything for me, and so I nodded firmly.

After I earnestly stated all the ideas I had about the computer, my mom finally agreed to it.

Thinking about it, I guess it was a good thing I said,

“I want to write a novel.”

If, instead, I had said,

“I intend to be an author.”

I suppose my mom’s reaction would be a lot different.

My birthday came, and mom agreed to it, so we went off to buy one.

In any case, mom and I weren’t very familiar with the functions, so she personally drove me to a major electronics wholesale store.

To summarize, I just needed to write a story fluidly.

As for the other functions, like being unable to watch television, use the wireless LAN, edit videos or play games—

I didn’t need them at all.

Having made up my mind, I said this to the shop attendant.

And then, the middle-aged attendant asked my mother,

“Are you intending to write a novel in the future?”

Unabashedly, I answered from the side,

“Yes!”

“Wow! Now that’s really amazing!”

The attendant was suddenly enthusiastic as he explained all sorts of various details to us discreetly.

“That attendant back then was really passionately...and he really helped me out a lot.”

I began to keenly discuss the savior whose name and face I couldn’t remember.

“Do you intend to use him as the protagonist of a novel?”

Nitadori chimed in such a suggestion.

“...Do you mind letting me jot this down in the notebook first?”

That attendant taught me a lot of things.

“Now then, it’s your turn to teach me about them, sensei.”

“Understood...do you have any intention to write a novel?”

“Currently not at the moment, but I want to know about it.”

“Got it. First, the attendant told me—”

I didn’t have to necessarily buy a new computer (that shop also runs a second-hand department).

He told me that if I was worried about the price, I could choose to pick up a second-hand computer that was certainly maintained.

“Well, that makes sense since the budget’s more important. Did he tell you which computers are more suited for writing novels?”

“He did. There aren’t any special models that are extremely suitable...but I guess you’ll know that computers are generally classified as those desktop computers fixed to the table, and the notepad computers that can be flipped open. The attendant did tell me that the notepad computers are very convenient, that even if I don’t bring it out of the house, it’s easier for me to take it to any room.”

“I see. I got a desktop computer at home and a personalized laptop. Most of the time, I do use that personalized laptop.”

The attendant also told me that most laptops had internal batteries installed, and if there was a power outage, the damage caused will be minimal.

For those office workers who often had to bring their chargers along and use those in cafes, a light laptop would be of great benefit to them; for those that would typically use their computers at home only, it would be more suitable to choose one with a large screen and a wide keyboard instead of a thin, short one. Furthermore, external keyboards could be connected to it, and I could choose them according to my preferences.

“Oh, so a notepad computer can be connected to an external keyboard. I didn’t know that.”

“I did see an author actually do that, saying that he wanted a unique fan-shaped keyboard. Personally, I’m fine with the original equipment alone.

The attendant then told me that the computer operating systems could generally be classified as Macintosh and Windows, and that for beginners, Windows would be the way to go. (perhaps the Macintosh users will get up and shout ‘I protest’!)

There was no need to be particular about the latest operating system. Naturally however, it’s not a good thing to use a particularly old one till a point where the software compare had stopped providing services for it.

“I see. What about the key word processing systems?”

“He told me of two well known ones.”

These two systems were ‘Microsoft Word’ and ‘Just Systems — Ichitaro’.

The attendant did say that it was merely a question of preference, but many companies did have Word pre-installed in them.

“But in Japanese input, the attendant strongly recommended the ‘ATOK’.”

“A tok?”

I drew the letters out with my finger as I answered Nitadori,

“4 capital letters, A, T, O, K.”

“I see. So what is the Japanese input system about? Though I do have a rough gist of things.”

“To put it simply, it’s an input system that can switch all the typed letters into hiragana, katakana and kanji. The computers sold in Japan would all have such a system installed.”

However, Word itself did not have ATOK included, for ATOK was a software developed by the makers of ‘Ichitaro’, ‘Just Systems’.

The attendant also told me ATOK is currently the smartest way of inputting Japanese, and literary writers had high praises for it. ATOK also had an electronic dictionary attached to it, and would show the meaning of the word when typing. If my budget would allow, this software would certainly be more convenient.

“Actually, most of the authors I know of are ATOK users. Of course, I don’t understand anything about this, so he really helped me a lot out there.”

Also, the attendant did tell me that the basic software wasn’t very big (it didn’t take up a lot of storage space), so I could save it in a hard disk, a memory card, or a USB drive.

However, any saved system may suddenly malfunction, so I need to have a spare backup every time.

“And just like that, I bought a computer for writing while following the advice from that shop attendant.”

It was a second hand laptop produced by a Japanese manufacturer, and cost about 30,000 Yen.

The word processing unit I chose was a pre-installed Microsoft Word, and the additional ATOK electronic dictionary was purchased separately.

On top of that, I also bought a USB memory stick for storage.

To deal with any problems I may had, I also bought a manual for the computer and Word (I can borrow it from the library, but I still wish to have something like this with me around).

Also, I bought a game software, the only one I have.

It's a typing game, enabling me to input the words quickly and correctly.

"When I laid out every single thing I bought onto the table, I was really moved."

And from then on, I began to write.

I equipped myself with the weapons necessary for battle.

"In other words, you're like a delinquent who just got a bike, huh?"

"That's really a terrible example—but, yeah, I guess."

"How about the way to use it? Did you learn it immediately?"

"Well, of course. I was using it from morning till night during my summer vacations."

In any case, I read the books I had—

In the meantime, I began to actually use the computer and learn how to use the two common softwares, Word and ATOK.

And then, I began to play the typing game.

When entering the search terms in the library, I would type them with my two index fingers, slowly.

If I want to write a novel, how I typed would definitely would not be a match to my thinking speed. Even when I was writing out my thoughts, it was not as fast as the speed of my delusions, and I got increasingly irate.

When playing this typing game, I was serious no matter how many times I failed. From there, I learned the importance of the Home position and the correct way to place my fingers.

For the input methods, there was the 'romaji' input method which uses alphabets and the direct 'kana input'; I chose the former.

As for why that's the case, it's because I have less to remember about the position of the keys (but in contrast, the number of keys I have to type will increase).

After typing to a certain level of familiarity, I began to input the content of my delusions notebook into the computer, and began typing.

“Characters, main’, ‘heroine’, ‘sub characters’, ‘world setting’, ‘conversations’.

I proceeded to name my files, and entered them into Word.

Just as how it was writing the delusion notebook, I entered the words in a horizontal manner. I was already used to writing in a horizontal format, so till this point, I continued to write in a horizontal manner.

A computer’s really a wonderful tool, but there are two points to pay particular mind to.

The first thing is not to let the computer malfunction.

A computer’s just an important machine. It’s a laptop, but I’ll only use it in either my room or the living room, and never will I bring out out of the house.

The second is not to cause my vision to worsen.

Extraordinarily, this bookworm here had yet to worsen his vision.

Perhaps it was because I did abide by the rule ‘to not read books in the dark’. Furthermore, the scenery on the streets was wide whenever I head home, and I typically look far away, I guess. On a side note, my mother’s vision is rather good too.

My eyes really got tired (and my hands too) before I got used to using the computer.

I learned how to adjust the screen brightness and the font size according to my own preferences, and the situation improved somewhat; however, I did make sure not to stay ijn front of the computer for that long.

The scenery outside the house window’s wonderful, and when I’m finally able to rest, I’ll look out of the windows, coming up with all sorts of delusional settings.

I wonder how long did I look at that mountain altogether?

Once I got used to it, using the computer itself was really an enjoyable thing.

Once my typing speed increased, I was able to convert what I thought into words.

The computer’s really a magical machine that converts my delusions into beautiful words. This tool has changed my life.

With that sort of attitude I had—

“So you managed it?”

Nitadori asked,

“Yeah, that’s what I think now.”

I answered.

And after I entered all 5 books of my delusions into the laptop, I again created another 2 books worth of delusions, and saved them.

After that, I decided on writing a novel.

“Now then, I’ll try writing a novel. Time to write, write!”

My 8th grade summer vacation was about to end.

I already answered the question ‘why did I choose to write, and when’,

“*Were you able to write it all out at first? Or was it really difficult?*”

If I remember correctly, that was the next next question.

“Now then, I’ll answer the question ‘was I able to write it out at first’—”

“Yes, yes.”

Nitadori, seated on my right, had her eyes under the glasses staring straight at me.

I didn’t know what she was hoping for, but I could only answer honestly,

“I couldn’t write at all.”

“What?”

In my life till this point, the toughest point for me was the second semester of my 8th grade.

Perhaps there will be more trying periods in the future, good if it doesn’t happen.

There wasn’t any issue with my school life.

I’ll still attend school every day. Though I’ll lapse into delusions at times, I would attend classes obediently, and I would study obediently before the exams.

I still had no friends, but as it was the case normally, I didn’t really mind.

The problem was writing the novel.

I learned how to use the computer, and did not suffer for that.

The delusions file accumulated quite a bit.

I did think of some characters I thought to be cool.

The settings database continued to accumulate and refined. I once created a history calendar for characters I created based on months, like 'he stood in front of the wet nurse at this year and month'. Thinking back about it, it really was rather hilarious.

However—

"I couldn't write a novel. Nothing at all."

"I see, how..."

Nitadori peered back at me with a worried look.

Well, it's not like I can't write right now. You don't have to give me such a look here.

I probably thought that I could write a novel as long as I had the setting.

I thought that if I imported the created characters, they would move on their own.

Since the characters popping out from the notebook would move and interact on their own, I just had to observe them and record their actions.

I may be boasting here, but I did think all the characters had their own charms, and they certainly would do things with much charisma.

That however was not the case.

In my eyes, they did seem to pop out from the words, standing there.

But they would not move. They were standing still, like puppets lined in a row.

It felt like I was writing an observation diary of a puppy, only to find that it was a puppy plushie.

It really was weird.

Till this point, was I not thinking of all sorts of delusions in my mind, how the characters' conversations go, how they look in their actions? They were fluent in their words, fluid in their actions.

However, even after inputting the character names as the pronouns on the blank white screen, I couldn't write the words behind. I couldn't think of what the characters would do next, so the characters still wouldn't move.

I once thought of lines I thought were interesting, and wrote a conversation.

And then I wrote a few of them.

However, a conversation between characters was just a single scene, and even if I did link them all together, that would not form a novel.

In the proceeding 1 month or so, I was brainstorming, racking my head hard in front of the computer screen.

I had the setting information, I could see the scene, and I could write the conversations.

However, I didn't know how to convert them all into a novel. I didn't know where I should begin.

The problem wasn't that I couldn't write a story.

The precedent problem was that, 'I didn't know what sort of a story I should be writing'.

I was unable to do what I wanted to do—

To say that it was arduous, well, it certainly was.

But even so, I won't die because of that.

Back then, I didn't intend to register for the newcomer award, and so there was no pressure in meeting the submission date.

Thinking back about it, I guess I'm really relieved that I didn't frustrate myself into getting dejected and thinking that I couldn't do it.

Summer passed, September went by, and it was the first Saturday of October.

"I can't think of anything yesterday. Let's not touch the computer for today."

Having such a notion, I escaped to a bookshop cum DVD rental shop that morning.

I intended to rent some movies I had yet to watch and bring them home.

Over there, I found a hint as to why I couldn't write a light novel.

"What is it?"

While Nitadori asked me with a shrill voice, I continued to sip the tea. My voice wasn't exceptionally loud, but my throat was parched after talking for that long.

Did I ever talk this much before? Probably not.

Did I ever talk this much to a girl before? Definitely not.

The second bottle's empty too. The train went through at least half the distance, and the now many street lights were passing towards the back outside the drenched windows.

Staring back at Nitadori's face, I answered nonchalantly,

"Erm, can we continue next week?"

"Ehhhh? There's still time, right?"

She glared back at me.

"Now then, let's continue. I'll start off with a question—if you want to rent a DVD, have no particular idea of what you want to watch, and intend to pick something that looks interesting, what will you do at this point?"

"Erm...I'll look at the packaging."

"Yeah, that's what I'll do too. I'll look at the movie title, cover photo, have a rough gist of what the movie's about, and develop an interest. But if that alone still isn't enough to judge, what will you do next?"

"I'll...look at the back of the cover."

"Why?"

"Because the 'synopsis' is there, isn't it?"

"That's the clue I'm talking about."

The synopsis.

A simple paragraph that succinctly describes the plot of the story.

While looking for the synopsis of interesting stories that day, I was looking at the back of the cover.

Most of them would contain a brief summary of the movie plot, approximately 200 words in length.

For example, if there was a movie titled 'Kindergarten of the Dead',

"A rabbit with a zombie virus residing in it inadvertently entered into kindergarten○×, causing the unwittingly kindergarten kids to become zombies one after another. The only escapee, the kindergarten teacher Linda, began a lonely battle to prevent the zombies, still doing the same actions, from escaping the kindergarten. She tried to make them tired by preparing snacks and letting them play games that would distract them, and make them take naps like usual. However, she didn't know that her boyfriend Robert, working at the donut shop, did a kind, unnecessary act of bringing some snacks in..."

The story would probably go like this. On a side note, that was what I just came up with.

"What's that about? I want to see."

Nitadori's eyes were blazing. I really don't understand her at all, but it doesn't seem like she hates zombie movies.

"No, this, really is impossible. That's just what I just spoke on the fly."

I'm really glad that she found it really interesting, but who exactly would come up with funding for this movie? I probably will develop this point into a point. Wait, there are so many zombie movies out there; maybe someone did film something similar, just that I didn't know.

"Leaving that aside—"

I divert my conversation back on topic,

"Back then, I read through the story synopsis of several DVDs, and to my great surprise, I found that I never paid any particular mind to the synopsis of the story."

I had many delusions in the past.

Whenever I remained awake, perhaps one-fifth of the time remained in delusions.

But those delusions were all settings, scenes and conversations.

None of those were things that were introduced in the synopsis, the 'plot'.

Even after repeating this scene in my mind regarding the story of 'the terrorist attack assaulting the Middle School'—

All I had been thinking about how the terrorists disguised themselves as milk sellers, the setting of the terrorists, the reason for attacks, all sorts of action scenes, and the various ways of death the physical education teacher would suffer no matter how hard he tried (I'm sorry), the decisive trap in the blackboard duster used for the last battle, and also the last scene with the protagonist returning home, saying "I'm back. Really tired here. What's for tea?"

These delusions only would only be mere parts.

They did not link at all.

Without being able to link, I wouldn't be able to complete the story.

And inside that empty DVD rental shop, I muttered,

"So I never thought about the story before..."

After that, I read through the back of the DVD packages.

I suppose I would be deemed as a weird middle school student who entered the shop the first thing in the morning, looking at the back of the packaging one after one. Till this day, I'm still grateful that the shop attendant didn't chase me out.

And I continued to read the 'synopsis'.

After being there for more than 2 hours, I didn't rent a single copy.

"I-I see...that's really amazing! So touching! Dramatic!"

"Ah, no, that's not really..."

I felt really flustered to have Nitadori hail me like this.

And then,

"Why didn't you figure out something like this in the first place?"

I figured that what she said then really was appropriate.

"Amazing..."

Nitadori looked very impressed, So, what's next? and then she prompted me with those looks.

"Ah, yes...I finally began to think of a plot, and recorded it down."

However, that itself wasn't a simple matter either.

First, the characters I thought of before had many settings to them.

These settings would obstruct me from thinking of the plot.

Whenever I thought of the plot, I would include those characters and add more parameters to them. I went through such setbacks countless times.

Finally, I decided not to include the characters in the plot.

I prevented them from appearing in my mind, ostensibly telling them, Go sleep for now, and I didn't open the file I had at that moment.

I continued to recall the many story synopsis I thought of, trying my best not to think of the characters I had—

The protagonist, heroines, rivals, last boss.

I tried writing the plot of the story through such a simple expression.

While pondering so hard about it, I suddenly had a story appear in my mind,

"The protagonist is a Middle School student, and on a certain day, he found a girl sitting at an empty seat in his class.

Nobody tried talking to the girl, and she appeared lonely. The protagonist decided to talk to her after school, and made friends with her. However, she only chose to talk to the protagonist after school in the empty classroom.

On a certain rainy day, after they both ended their conversations, the protagonist went home alone. Just when he was walking down the National Highway hillpath passing by the pedestrian pathway, he was suddenly pushed to the side from behind.

He looked back, saw the heroine, and a truck headed towards her while ignoring the traffic signals.

I deliberately ended my synopsis at this point.

"And then?"

As expected, Nitadori got baited. She leaned her glasses forward, giving a terrifying look.

"Erm..."

"You're teasing me now, right? —Ah, is that something you're intending to publish in the future or something...? Erm, sorry about that..."

I was hoping to give Nitadori time to guess the ending, but it seemed I caused her unnecessary misunderstandings and made her worry, so I frantically shook my head, saying,

"No, that's not it! Sorry! I'll explain it later—the truck veered off just like that. The protagonist thought that she would have been knocked away just like that, but he never saw her. She never attended school beginning from the next day. The protagonist found her photo in the library, and learned that she committed suicide on an incoming truck a long time ago at that pedestrian crossing."

“Ohh!!”

Nitadori began to clap,

“Hey, stop it!”

I hushed my voice, stopping her. And then,

“This story wasn’t actually really that complete...but it was the first time I actually thought of an ending, so I couldn’t forget about it...the ghost ending however was rather old-fashioned, and I really couldn’t understand why the protagonist would be saved. In any case, if the protagonist wasn’t talking to the heroine after school, he wouldn’t be appearing at that time and place, right? What were the heroine’s intentions?”

I pointed out the flaws in my created story as an example, and Nitadori said,

“That’s true now that you mention it. When I was listening to it however, I didn’t notice those flaws at all. It really was a touching story, you know?”

“I see. Thanks...”

“Since you did manage to complete a story of that level, I guess you definitely have talent! You’ll definitely be an author in the future.”

“Well...I’m already one.”

On that day, I was still unable to finish answering all the questions.

The train entered the city, and was about to reach the terminal.

“See you next week.”

Nitadori said, and I nodded my head,

“Sorry for keep you busy for that long. Do you still want those snacks?”

She continued, pointing at the other bag of potato chips.

There was no reason for me to reason. Since it was the sea salt potato chips, I would gladly accept them no matter how many they were.

I thought of eating the potato chips while watching anime in the hotel at night. I could watch anime than those in my hometown, and that was an added perk I was grateful for.

The announcement indicating the arrival of the train rang. Many passengers got off midway through; there were only a few passengers left, and they too got ready.

I suddenly wondered about something.

Where exactly was Nitadori staying at? Was it fine for me to ask such a private question however? She's a girl. Would I not annoy her in that case? Would I be frowned upon?

While feeling frustrated over this,

"I'll be staying at my relative's house."

Nitadori got up from her seat, saying this as she took her bag along. Does this girl have esper powers, I wondered again. She then continued,

"My relative stays at Mejiro, and well...to tell you the truth, that relative will be picking me up at the station..."

After seeing her give an unspoken apologetic look, I finally managed to interpret this atmosphere, a rarity at that.

I never been to Mejiro before, and I'm not particularly sure as to where it was in Tokyo, but I did hear that it's an upscale residential area.

It seemed Nitadori's family's really well off. Perhaps there were strict limits imposed on her, either in terms of curfew or friends.

And I then proceeded to mention the question i just thjought of,

"In other words, if you continue to remain with me, and be spotted with me, things will get bad, right?"

"Yes."

Nitadori answered, giving a perfect English pronunciation.

"Understood. Now...do I get off first? Or—"

"Please do get off first. I really hope that even if we do pass by each other on a certain platform, you'll help by pretending not to notice me! Please do that!"

She raised a hand to beg.

Well, it wasn't some big deal, just similar to how it was at school.

"Understood."

I got up from my seat, took the backpack and shopping pack to the corridor, and then said,

"I'll be going then."

"Thanks. See you next week."

And so, I deliberately moved forward in this still moving train carriage.

Chapter 3 – April 24, I Told Her

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

My neck was still choked by Nitadori's icy hands.

My mind was dyed a complete black.

I did not feel any suffering. No pain at all.

That one single Nitadori's tear finally landed on my cheek.

However, another 7 of them remained in mid-air as time slowly trekked back.

From a moment back, the times and memories I had knowing Nitadori raced by in my mind at a blinding speed. I recalled what we did and what we said, and they were so clear it was terrifying.

I understood.

This was the so-called 'near-death experience'.

The first time I saw one.

"Now then, can we continue on from the previous week, sensei?"

April 25th, the evening of the 4th Thursday this month.⁴

The weather was clear since early morning. I took the Limited Express as usual, and secured that familiar seat.

It was approximately 2 minutes till the train departed punctually when Nitadori came over from the back of the carriage.

I didn't see her on the platform on this day, so I started to worry if she was going to reach the station later.

But even so, her hand was not holding any luggage, instead holding a convenience store bag.

On this day, she again bought 2 bags of the sea salt potato chips that I like (and her too), with many more PET bottles as compared to normal.

Whenever I ate any of those, I would have to answer her questions.

⁴ I guess it should be 24th.

On the prior Friday,

The After Record of 'Vice Versa' ended without a hitch.

And Meek, whom Nitadori voiced, still had no speaking lines—

Nitadori arrived at the booth before I did, and greeted the senior voice actors countless times.

School life beginning from Monday was no different from usual.

Neither of us would talk to each other at school.

Or rather, I would say that I was unable to communicate with any of my classmates.

Everyone viewed me as an upperclassman (though that certainly is the case), and for quite some time, whenever they had to talk to me, they would naturally use formal language.

I was the only one isolated in class—

That would be what I had assumed, but that wasn't the case.

There were another two who never spoke to anyone else in the class.

And with that, were the three of us, known as 'the lonely trio' (such a strange term), able to be good friends? Actually, that didn't happen, and probably will never happen.

In contrast, Nitadori's a perfectly normal student with no issues at all.

She's a rookie, but it seemed nobody knew about the fact that she's a voice actress. Perhaps this is because she never had any named characters, so her fame was rather low, I suppose. This situation might change once 'Vice Versa' airs in July.

But I again learned something about her.

Nitadori would never take physical education lessons.

It happened two days ago, on Tuesday,

There was a sudden rain, and the boys' PE class had to be changed to the gym.

The girls were playing volleyball over there (and they were furious when the boys came to join them), yet Nitadori was sitting in a corner of the gym, dressed in uniform.

I thought it would be just that she didn't take part in PE classes on that day, but I was mistaken.

During the later 4th period, we were seated in the classroom, waiting for the teacher, only to be notified that it was a self-study period.

I decided to head to the library to read some books alone, but just when I intended to stand up, several girls, who were probably on good terms with Nitadori (probably), started chatting about the gym class from before,

“I really hate having to go to PE. Ahh, I’m really envious of you here, Eri...”

And one of them grumbled,

“It’s good, right? but even I want to do some swimming in the pool during the summer!”

Nitadori cheerfully answered.

“Hm, you’re right. There are certain situations when I like it.”

And that girl easily retracted what she just said.

I immediately left the classroom upon hearing that, so I wasn’t certain as to what they were talking about afterwards. However, I did ascertain that Nitadori never attended any PE classes.

I didn’t know the reason.

I wanted to ask her this question on the train, and I hoped she would introduce me to more of the voice acting industry.

“Last week, I learned that you learned ‘how to create stories’ when you were younger! Please tell me what’s next.”

I thought that once Nitadori was satisfied with my answers, I would ask her.

It was probably 3 and a half years ago.

During the Autumn of 8th grade, I understood that the one imperative element in writing a story was not the setting, but the story.

And from then on, I focused on constructing stories every day, writing them down.

For the first time, I had a Word document file called ‘story ideas’ in my computer. Soon afterwards, I continued to accumulate works and added many more files, like,

“A romance story of an alien college student hitchhiking a ride.”

“Serial murders in a summer village. The culprit’s the grandmother.”

“My classmate’s a helicopter.”

“The story of survival after a luxury cruise was shipwrecked.”

“My grandfather’s actually my little sister.”

And so, I created more files.

Afterwards, a folder to store these files was born,

“Story ideas folder”

I felt that the technical issues of how to create a story, how to enrich a story—

And also, how to continue writing or did I continue to write did not fit what the question was asking for. It would have taken me a long time to answer too, so I chose not to answer them.

Thus, I neglected the explanations of those parts, and told her that a certain file was created at the end of November, right when Winter was about to start.

That file was known as—

“Someone becoming an immortal after heading into another world.”

“Ohh! It’s ‘Vice Versa’!”

Nitadori squealed with an extremely excited voice.

It’s a good thing that the train just departed, and there were only a few characters, but the situation was really dangerous.

“Sorry...sorry...”

Nitadori lowered her shoulders slightly.

And then, she immediately puffed her chest,

“Well, you actually came up with such a story quite a while back! Now it’s becoming an anime that’s going to be aired in July! That’s really amazing!”

I’m really happy that she’s praising me like this, and really grateful that she actually made a recap of my journey.

Because when I thought of that story—

Various things happened—

It’s really because a lot of things happened that I became this current me.

However, I’m not the type to say “wahaha! How about that? I’m amazing here, right?” or something, so I tweaked the topic a little at this moment.

“But I only finished my contest entry during April the following year, so I had about 6 months to write everything from top to bottom.”

“Well...you registered your entry during April...so if you started from back then, was that the first novel you actually completed in your life, sensei? The first one you used to participate in the contest?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re really amazing after all...now then, please tell me your history till the following April, sensei.”

On a certain day, the story that would form the basis of ‘Vice Versa’ later on was born, and was growing exponentially.

Amongst all the story ideas that I came up with, that was the one that expanded fastest.

The protagonist was transported to the other world, gained an immortal body, and provided quite the contribution, only to return back to his original world in the end.

That was the story at first, but I continued to add in all kinds of elements.

Some of them were added in later on when I actually began to write—

As for the ploy for the two protagonists with similar looks and names to be body doubles, and that the enemy general was a girl, and that the other guy to pass through when the original returned back to his world, I remember it just came out continually once I established my file. I was so amped up that I was tapping furiously at the keyboard.

I managed to come up with the flow of the story successfully, and thinking about it, the twists were very obvious, but I didn’t think too much about it back then. I continued to write all sorts of plots with the protagonist Shin as the center.

I didn’t have a habit of writing diary entries (and only began to do so once my debut was confirmed), so unfortunately, I couldn’t remember exactly when I thought of which elements.

Finally—

The story of ‘Vice Versa’ was completed.

“That’s amazing! And from then? Were you able to write?”

“...”

“Sensei?”

“About that—”

Once the story of ‘Vice Versa’ was completed, I thought.

I can write this! I ‘just’ have to get down writing!

The story didn’t have to be long, I can finish it off within 2 weeks or so, right?

That was what I estimated.

If I could write 20 pages of a pocket book format, I would be able to write 280 pages in 14 days.

What, I can finish it within this year!

No, by the end of the first half of this month?

Maybe I can write something else in the latter half of the month?

“Thinking back about it...I guess I really was foolish back then...”

I really was very regretful when I recalled the situation back then.

“Anyone would have some unforgivable past, and they will continue to grow with such a past. Even bitter food will become part of flesh and blood, no?”

Nitadori came up with an impressively dramatic line in her impressively dramatic act.

A pro voice actor’s acting really amazing. I get to hear this performance for free! I thought.

And so, Nitadori said,

“You couldn’t write?”

“Yeah.”

I couldn’t write at all.

There was once when I couldn’t think of the story.

And I barely managed to overcome that issue.

There were some differences in the details of the original story and what was published, but I did manage to finish the story.

Now then, what exactly could I not write?

I couldn't write the story itself.

"You couldn't write the story, so in other words...you couldn't write the entire novel, right?"

I nodded firmly, and answered,

"The story was completed, and I managed the settings of the protagonists. However, I just couldn't write. I didn't know how to express the content into words."

"Is this what they call the 'writing bottleneck'?"

After hearing this question, I shook my head, answering,

"I think that's a term used when someone usually capable of writing is not in an ideal state when writing."

"Oh, I see."

"My situation's that I couldn't write anything at all—for example, when I'm writing a story, and I don't know what to write, I'm like a person standing on the soccer field without knowing the rules for soccer."

"Ah, yeah, I can vividly imagine that sort of situation. I don't know soccer rules at all, so I'll be left at a loss wondering what I'm to do. The only thing I know is that I can't use my hands."

"But you probably know that you can score by kicking the ball into the net, right? I didn't know about such a thing at all. And then, I finally understood."

"Yes yes."

"I remembered all the soccer rules, and understood that I have to play the ball with my feet and work together with my teammates, prevent the ball from being taken by the opponent, and kick the ball into the net. 'Okay, now let's just kick the ball into the net! I can play soccer now!' That was exactly what I thought, but in fact, I could only stand still there, unable to move at all. I didn't know how to dribble the ball at all."

"In other words—'you didn't know how to kick the ball, right?'"

"Yeah. Even if I did understand all the rules—I still can't play soccer if I can't kick the ball. I felt that the me unable to write an essay was like a player who couldn't kick a ball." (TN Snark: In ball games, you either hit the ball, or the ball hits you.)

"I see. I can imagine such a situation...then...how did the situation change afterwards? You did submit for competition before it got published, so you did write it out after all, right? You were able to write it all out, am I correct?"

I continued to sip the tea as I nodded,

“So did anyone teach you that?”

I sealed the PET bottle, and shook my head,

“Then?”

Nitadori gave me a skeptical look, and I in response quickly inhaled,

“I just kept on struggling.”

This was the reason why I said I suffered most in the second trimester of my 8th grade.

I couldn’t write an essay at all, yet I just continued to write—I could say that every single day was literally a ‘struggle’.

It was to be expected that I couldn’t write a novel at all, for I never did write a novel before.

Then, there was no other choice but to keep practicing.

How was I to practice?

I wondered. Since I had the story, I just had to get down to writing it.

In other words,

“I can’t write a novel essay.”

↓

“I got no choice but to keep practicing.”

↓

“How about I continue to practice by writing novel essays?”

Theoretically, that was truly a grave mistake.

However, I accepted the challenge.

While the word ‘challenge’ sounded cool, I in fact was beaten, battered and bruised all over, aching everywhere.

I kept writing and erasing, and repeating it; advancing when I felt I could write something, only to sink into a mire again.

I merely managed to write a half-baked story, yet the lack of progress left me very angst.

There were a few times when I really thought of giving up.

“I guess it’s impossible for me to write a novel.”

I often had this notion. If I had admitted that, I would have been relieved.

“So why didn’t you give up in the end?”

Nitadori asked with the gentlest tone and expression till this point.

Why was that?

First,

“I finally managed to get this laptop here, you know?”

I probably had such a feeling here.

Mom bought a laptop, and I could use it freely.

I managed to obtain a weapon, and yet I wanted to run away from a battle?

However, I felt that was definitely not the primary reason.

I had a languid personality. It would not be out of character of me if I were to slowly wave my hands,

“Now’s not the time to panic.”

And say such words, convincing myself to write the story before I grew up to escape the pain and struggles.

“I want to change the past me! I want to live my life anew!”

I did certainly have such feelings. I didn’t feel any dissatisfaction with regards to my Middle School life.

“I’ve already began! I’ll regret it if I’m going to run away now!”

And surely there was no way I had such feelings.

I really was not a feisty, competitive person.

To answer Nitadori’s question, I tried to focus and recall the situation back then.

“Sorry, I don’t know.”

But that was all I could only answer. I then added on,

"Though I'm thinking about it now...back then, I just thought that I was really suffering, but I guess I was really happy...? No, I guess now. 'Recalling that I was really happy' here is completely different from being 'really happy'..."

I didn't manage to answer Nitadori's question,

"..."

But she nodded on wordlessly.

I began to write.

I continued to write 'Vice Versa' with my pathetic writing.

I thought that since it was repeated practice, it was fine for me to just keep writing a jumble out of the mess.

Time-wise, I began writing from the beginning of December, and devoted all my non-studying time on this. Thanks to that, I had my reading time drastically reduced.

After that, it came to a certain day in Winter vacation,

"Eh? Did my writing speed increase?"

I thought.

That was something that happened when I spent the entire day writing during the vacations.

I gathered my concentration and tapped at the keyboard for approximately 2 hours; I was taken aback once I counted the number of pages I wrote during this time. I didn't expect myself to have written so many pages unwittingly.

"That happened a long time back, so this is the only conclusion I could make...anyway, thanks to me practicing how to write, I felt that my writing ability improved exponentially. No, wait—"

At this moment, I corrected myself.

"I'm not too sure of the meaning of the words 'writing ability'. I don't know how to appraise the quality of an essay. Is it better for me to write a story with beautiful prose? Or to write a story that's easy to understand?"

Nitadori continue to listen silently.

"So I hope that you'll understand what I mean by 'improved writing ability' as 'writing ability has reached a decent stage'. However, I'm not too certain as to consider how 'decent' is like..."

My thoughts lacked concisely, and the more I talked, the more I felt I was mired in a swamp.

“Erm, well, in other words...I just ended up being increasingly able to write essays.”

That was the one I firmly decided.

To be honest, I really felt that my explanation was crude and lacking explanatory,

“It’s really easy to understand though.”

But Nitadori told me this. Is that so? I wondered, but I didn’t voice my thoughts out.

“Isn’t it the same for acting? There isn’t anyone who’ll have their acting skills improve so suddenly. If there are people who think that my acting skills have improved, it’s probably just because I haven’t met that person for a long time. It’s a skill that requires continual practice every day, accumulation and gradual improvement. Isn’t it the same with learning musical instruments?”

“Ah...if only I did come up with such an example. Yes, it’s like learning musical instruments.”

“Ahaha. I guess it’s like ‘learning how to speak a foreign language because you’re abandoned in a foreign country, right?’”

“Yes yes yes.”

“And also like ‘learning how to swim when you’re drowning’, right?”

“Please let me use this one the next time.”

I hydrated my throat by drinking some tea.

Before continuing on, I decided to head to the toilet first.

I had to ask Nitadori to stand up to get to the aisle, as she was seated next to it. Though apologetic, I was left with no other choice, for I was already terrified thinking about letting a girl pull her knees in to let me through.

And I nodded slightly at her, who stood up for me,

“Thanks.”

“Don’t mind.”

My bespectacled classmate stood up, saying,

“I still have lots of things to ask when you come back. Don’t run away.”

“From the inside of a still moving train?”

“You’ll definitely be able to do it, sensei. Be confident in yourself!”

I originally wanted to retort her, what do you think authors are? but if I were to respond, I got the feeling that she would continue on, and so I gave up.

The toilet was at the entrance of the next carriage car, right behind the automatic doors behind me.

Once I was done, I washed my hands, wondering where did I stop at, and returned to my seat.

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine! You didn’t run away.”

And then, I troubled Nitadori again by asking her to stand up and let me through.

“So you found that your writing ability became rather decent during winter break in your 8th grade. What kind of story happened during the 4 months until the registration.

Nitadori asked with an outstanding voice of intonation, like the narration of a TV commentator. I guess this is to be expected of a professional voice actress.

Moved by such an excitable tone, I began to delude, hoping that I could write a story of a high school girl like Nitadori debutting as a voice actress. What kind of a story will that be?

“Hello, sensei?”

I was dragged back to reality.

“Ah, yes. Erm, we’re starting from the winter break in 8th grade, right?”

I was writing ‘Vice Versa’ the entire time during winter break.

Of course, I did do my homework and eat my meals. Other than that, I spent most of my time locked at home, sitting in front of the laptop.

Once New Year passed, and the Winter break was about to end, how much of ‘Vice Versa’ did I managed to complete after 1 month of working?

“Did you complete all of it?”

“Impossible.”

“Half of it?”

“No.”

“...One quarter?”

“About there. That’s the part when Sin saved Shin and brought him to the palace, right at the moment when Shin saw Ema and was surprised the little sister resembled him too.”

“...”

In terms of plot twists in ‘Vice Versa’, this would be where the developing ended, and the changing began.

Nitadori was quietly surprised by it, but I felt back then that such progress was a lot.

When the 3rd trimester began in 8th grade, I naturally didn’t have as much time to write as the vacation, but I just continued to write.

I continued to revise my initial manuscript as I edited them. For a new work, the writing speed was rather ideal.

At that moment, I started to feel vexed.

What do I do after I’m done writing the novel?

“‘What do I do’ as in submitting an entry for the contest?”

“Yes.”

“Eh? You didn’t write it because you wanted to participate in the Dengeki Novel Prize?”

Nitadori again exclaimed in surprise,

“No, not at all.”

I shook my head.

“To be honest—”

I never intended to submit the story as an entry.

Despite only completing a quarter of ‘Vice Versa’ till that point, I intended to do my best and complete the work since I was able to write it out.

I had yet to decide what I wanted to do later on.

“You should take part in the contest! —Hey, wait? It’s over already, isn’t it...?”

Nitadori was a little amusing.

“Now then, why did you take part? And why did you choose Dengeki?”

Finally, I was about to face the final question of the many questions she posed me the previous week.

“First, regarding the issue of whether I was to register for a Newcomer award...to be honest, I really wasn’t very interested in it.:”

“Why?”

“I probably was a little timid. Submitting an entry for the entry would have meant I would be aiming to be an author.”

I answered. I glanced to the right, and found Nitadori giving me a mystified look.

“Well, that was really the case. I don’t suppose there aren’t many people who’ll think ‘I don’t want to publish a book’ after winning an award. But I don’t think you have any need to be timid there...? Why were you?”

“Back then, I really considered the issue of ‘can a Middle School student really take part in the contest?’ I was thinking if a brat like me could take part in this contest where people from all walks of life would aim to be professional authors and do their best to complete their masterpieces. Such a contest should be for people ‘more mature’ to take part in, right?”

I answered honestly. That was what I sincerely thought back then.

Nitadori probably wasn’t able to understand these words.

“Hm...”

And she let out a groan.

I heard that voice actors could only get jobs based on a strict selection, and no matter the age, they would have to go through such a competitive environment. It was to be expected that she couldn’t understand.

“Thinking back, I understand very well now that there wasn’t any need for me to think that way. I was still a brat more than 3 years ago however...”

Even till now, I don’t think that I’ve become an adult.

And Nitadori asked with a sharp look, ostensibly probing into my heart.

“You liked books so much, and worked hard to learn how to write a novel, but you never thought ‘I want to be an author in the future’, did you?”

"If it's whether I did have such thoughts, I'll say that I did have such thoughts. If it's whether I didn't have such thoughts, I'll say that I didn't have such thoughts."

"Okay sensei."

Nitadori raised her right hand, asking,

"I don't understand what you mean at all."

"Erm...that was what I thought, 'I really admire novelists, but it's impossible for me to be like them!'"

"..."

"I read many books in the past, and I was moved by them...but till now, I still feel that the authors who could write such works were really amazing! Well, that was what I thought."

"I understand that very well. Right now, I do think that you're really amazing, sensei."

"T-thanks...anyway, as a Middle School student, I didn't think I could be such an amazing person at all, and I thought that registering for the Newcomer award and aiming for a prize was way above my head."

"I see..."

Nitadori answered. I suppose she really couldn't understand how I felt exactly back then."

"But you did change your mind at a certain time, right? if not—"

"I wouldn't be here."

Once I answered this, Nitadori smiled, saying,

"Same here."

And,

"Then...did anyone convince you to take part in the contest? Or did someone see your novel and encourage you by saying 'this is really interesting! You should be an author!?'?"

After hearing this question, I shook my head affirmatively, saying,

"I never did show anyone 'Vice Versa' before it was submitted for the contest. In fact, mom was the only one in this world who knew that I was writing a novel, but even she never read it."

"But...I don't understand! Why exactly did you submit it to *Dengeki Bunko*?"

Nitadori gave up.

To answer her, I inhaled and pondered. *Ahh, she'll probably be shocked to hear these words.*

“Because the deadline was in April.”

“What?”

“The annual submission deadline for the Dengeki Novel Prize is April 10th. After looking at the calendar, I started to think, *Maybe I should complete ‘Vice Versa’ before then, and if I can finish it before then, let’s try submitting it for a contest. You see, it really was a great opportunity for me to see if I could complete my work, and there was the entire Spring break before the submission deadline when I could spend entire days writing.*

“...”

Nitadori again went silent.

I personally felt this was awkward too, but I had no other choice as that was the real reason.

“Erm, then...you never thought that ‘Dengeki Bunko is the largest light novel publisher’ or something?”

“I knew that, and to be precise, ‘the submission deadline for Dengeki Bunko just so happened to fit my aims’. I had the thought that the readers of ‘Vice Versa’ should be light novel readers when I worked on it.”

“So, to summarize, you had the delusional dreams of an author, and the time of completion just so happened to be the deadline of a Newcomer award—”

I nodded on. Nitadori continued,

“You tried submitting an entry to test your abilities, and sent it to the largest, probably the most competitive publishing company in the industry.”

I nodded on.

“And the outcome’s that you debuted with a work you created in 8th grade, and now a high school student and an author, your work so successful it can be made into an anime.”

I nodded on.

“...”

While looking back at a stunned Nitadori, I pondered,

The wheel of fate turns so unexpectedly

Getting back to the time when I decided on submitting an entry.

It really was a great opportunity, no matter the reason, to have a deadline.

My passion for writing became stronger than ever.

The essays were a little easier to write, but there were often times where I would pause and ponder about the plot, write and stop, rinse and repeat.

My aim was not to be an author, but to complete the first ever novel I wrote in my life 'Vice Versa'. And then I would submit it to the Dengeki Novel Prize.

To soothe my parched throat, I opened a new bottle of tea.

"You did manage to meet the deadline, but it was still really tough on you, wasn't it?"

Of course!

I nodded while drinking. It's really hard to drink like this.

Once I move my mouth away, I again answered,

"Of course! I was writing during the entire 3rd trimester in 8th grade, except for the period before the exams."

I was really busy back then, but I sealed my computer right before the exams, like how club activities were suspended for a week. Mom would most probably have forbade me from writing if my grades were to slip dramatically.

"I see...you were able to make it after all..."

"Yeah. My progress was about half when I entered Spring Break...and I only managed to write half the story after 2 and a half months. I had to finish the rest of it in the following 1 month."

"But you managed it."

"I really was spending the entire time writing from morning to night. But inexplicably, the second half was easier than the first half. No, I guess this isn't something strange. I did get used to writing after all."

I quipped,

"Also, with the entire story completed, I was looking forward to the climax in the second half. I really wanted to quickly get to the part where Shin kept escaping and finally decided to fight, and also the part where Pluto's gender was revealed!"

"..."

Nitadori merely started back at me.

"Ah, sorry. I got too excited there, I guess..."

I then apologized, but it seemed I was mistaken,

“No.”

Nitadori smiled, shaking her head slightly. And then,

“When did you finish writing ‘Vice Versa’?”

I really remembered what happened back then clearly.

“First off, I finished the last scene on April 2nd. No matter the result, I added the word ‘end’ at the end. I continued to revise the script on the screen over and over again, especially the end. I was really rushing things through, so the words became rather weird, and there were many times I had to correct. I then finished the editing work on the 6th, at midnight. Actually, the word ‘finished’ should only be used at such a moment.”

“It happened in the past, but congratulations!”

“Thanks...”

I never thought that someone would congratulate me over something that happened 3 years ago, but I was really happy.

“What did you feel after finishing the first ever novel? Satisfied, I supposed? Or moved to bits.”

“No, I didn’t have time for that. I really was busy after that.”

“Really? But didn’t you just have to print the novel out and send it through mail?”

Nitadori gave me a startled look, and I answered by telling her the one reason that caused me much headache.

“I didn’t have a printer at home.”

“Ah...”

“I heard that anyone can submit their entries in the Newcomer award through e-mails now, but to register for the Dengeki Novel Prize, whether it was back then or now, one had to print the original script. Back then, I didn’t have anything like an email address. On a side note, the ‘original script’ here would refer to a novel written on novel white paper, and there’s no need to print it on actual white paper.”

“Then, what did you do?”

“I went searching around on the internet at the library...but there wasn’t a shop that’s willing to print more than a hundred pieces of paper near my house. There were some business convenience shops near the town center offering such services however. My only option left was

to buy a printer, and the day before the Graduation Ceremony, I went about transferring a few public buses to obtain a new weapon quickly.”

“Isn’t it very expensive?”

“It’s not cheap, but not as expensive as I thought it would be. I spent a little more than 10,000 yen buying a black and white laserjet printer. Thank goodness I saved my pocket money...”

“What if...you didn’t have that much money to use...?”

“The Dengeki Novel Prize would surely be impossible for me. I guess I would have registered for other awards.”

“Then...you probably would have debuted there instead?”

“That’s a possibility...but there’s also a chance I would have failed to make the cut...”

“The most reliable thing in emergencies is still money after all...”

“No, well...maybe.”

“Sometimes, love or friendship alone would have left you helpless...”

“I guess...so.”

“Ah, please continue.”

“Eh? Ah, yes. I brought from the shop a printer, some spare toner, and lots of A4 sized printer paper. Also, I bought some ordinary envelopes used to store scripts, a large fixed envelope meant for mailing, a hole-puncher and a shoelace from a 100 yen shop.”

“How did you use the last two?”

“The registration regulations state that the entry has to have a hole in the right corner of the script, and it has to be tied together with a string. There are thin strings specially meant to fix them together, but I bought shoelaces because I wasn’t sure.”

“I see. Not a binder, huh?”

“I did ask the editor-in-charge before, and he said that it would be terrible if the binder was to slip off. There are page numbers on the submitted scripts, but if many pages are to slip off, or even mix with other works...”

“That really is...scary to think about.”

“Yeah, it really is. That’s why a string had to be used to bind them. I also heard that as the judging proceeds, they’ll need to print a few copies for the editors to see, and only then will they undo it.”

“I see.”

“Once I got back from the shop, I immediately installed the printer and did a test. I was really relieved once I knew that the printer could work normally. The following day was the 8th, the Graduation Ceremony for the 3rd years, and I began work once I got home.”

“That really was a pressing moment.”

“I was so anxious. The restrictions for the script was that there was to be 42 words per line and 34 lines for every paper. I was checking through the Word’s ‘page layout’ to see if there was any mistake, whether it was a portrait layout. Also, I had to check whether the page numbers were included in there afterwards.”

It seemed Nitadori was skeptical to the first half of my words, and she asked,

“Why’s the format so inconvenient? Can’t they accept 40 words and 30 lines...for example?”

“That Dengeki Bunko’s format. A single page has 42 words per line, and 17 lines, so by copying over to the other side, that’ll be 34 pages.”

“I see...so it’s to let the number of pages match the publisher’s standard formatting.”

“Yes. And after I printed it out, I realized that there was something important I forgot. I had to submit the plotline along with it.”

“Pollution⁵...like air pollution?”

“I’ll like to ask you how you’re going to send air pollution over later on...the plotline here refers to the ‘summary’. The entry regulations state that the contestant’s work has to have 2 other pieces of paper attached. One of them is the particulars form, like the title of the work, the actual name, pen name, address, age...phone number, and what else, I wonder? Sorry, I forgot about it. Remember to check it properly if you’re looking to register.”

“But I don’t intend to submit an entry.”

Nitadori answered with a laugh.

“So you need to write a summary of the story on the other piece of paper. How did you go about doing that?”

“I suppose any Newcomer award would require a clear outline of the contents of the story. There’s a word limit to that that. Dengeki Bunko limits it to 800 words, and since I forgot about writing that thing, I was frantically typing it out while the laser jet printer was buzzing away beside me.”

⁵ both can be read as Kougai

“But you just have to summarize the main points, right? This word count should be a cinch—”

For you, sensei? Nitadori was intending to say that, but was cut off by me.

“I didn’t know the correct way of writing it.”

“The correct way of writing.”

“Yeah. I didn’t know at all. I was wondering if I was supposed to write out the final ending in the story summary, or that I should do it like the story synopsis on the back of the DVD cover, and write some vague words like ‘what exactly awaits the protagonist—’”

“Ahh...so which one was it?”

“I hurried off to the library, and found many similar questions and answers, so it’s probable that everyone had the same issues as I did. The correct answer is ‘to actually write the ending’.”

I was in a panic—

But I managed to gather all the documents required for submission at midnight, on the 8th.

I arranged the printed script together, placed the particulars form and the story summary on it, and punctured a hole on the top right corner, binding the script together.

And just in case, since I had another shoelace, I duplicated another exactly similar document. The other document still rests in my desk.

Once I got back from school the next day, I checked the contents in the envelop.

“Alright...”

And I went off to the post office.

I remembered very well that when I was looking at the receipt in my hands, I felt that there was a drastic change in my thinking.

“An author? if only I can be one. I probably can’t do so however.”

My prior thinking was so pessimistic.

“An author? I’ll be glad if anyone told me that I should be one. I guess it’s fine for me to be one if that time comes.”

And my thinking now is quite optimistic.

“Ah...that’s amazing. You really worked hard completing this story and submitting it...it’s amazing, really amazing. You really did your best, really. Yes yes.”

Nitadori murmured as she hailed me.

I’m really glad to be receiving such praise now, but it’s because of now that I found it to be a wonderful memory—

Back then, I didn’t have such feelings at all.

Of course, I felt confident after finishing a long novel. That itself was hard work.

But the registration was not the end.

And neither was it the start.

To me, that was just the feeling of ‘being someone with the right to stand on the starting line’.

The actual moment of me standing on the ‘starting line’ was—

When I learned that I entered high school.

That was approximately a year since I registered.

I have to clarify what happened during a certain period.

The period from when I failed to make the cut till to when I was to debut.

I ate a few of the sea salt potato chips I really liked, and took a little break; after that, I told Nitadori what happened afterwards.

First, I managed to get through the 3rd judging panel, but I lost out in the 4th round because of age reasons.

“My! You lost because of such a reason!”

“I did fail. But the editorial branch did clarify a little, and allowed me to debut as a nominee. Right now, I do feel that was the best decision, and I’m really grateful that the editorial branch put in so much thought for my sake.”

And then, I told her of the promise I made with the editor-in-charge, that I would make my debut once I entered high school.

Nitadori did know that I did debut after I failed to make the cut (it was written in the afterword of the first volume of ‘Vice Versa’), but she was really surprised to know that there was a ‘hidden deal’.

“Now then...assuming that you didn’t make it to high school, sensei, what would have happened to you? If you couldn’t debut or go into high school.”

“I was afraid things would end up like that.”

“if that were to happen, what will you become like now?”

“How will I be now, huh...?”

I wondered a little, but it was too scary, so I gave up.

And then, I talked about how I took a break from school.

Once the work was decided to be adapted into an anime, I decided to take a break from school for a year to assist with the production of the anime and the continuation of the later volumes. I also told her the reason why I made this decision.

“I see...so that’s what happened...”

Nitadori was really impressed.

“Speaking of which, how many people know about this?”

“Erm...my mom, the editorial branch, including the editor-in-charge, the authors I met at the End-of-year party...there’s a lot of them. It really wasn’t some classified secret.”

This was how I ended the process before I resumed schooling again.

“Well...I guess I’m glad that you weren’t expelled as a result, sensei? I think that it’s not a waste for you to take a break from school for a year as you had something you had to do. I think that was the best choice you could have made.”

Nitadori said with much passion.

I wasn’t certain as to why she would say that so earnestly, but I was glad that she would approve of this decision I made after much pondering alone.

And I was completely relaxed.

“Thanks. Well, I wanted to go back to being an ordinary high school student, but I did something stupid on the first day...”

After I grumbled about what I shouldn’t have said to my classmates, Nitadori laughed, saying,

“It’s okay! The school year has just begun! We aren’t going to change classes in this school, so you have another 2 years to work hard in the same class! There’s also the school trip!”

And she so plainly stated such damaging words to me when I’m completely isolated in class.

Is this girl a sadist? Or is she able to see the future of living with many friends around me, living the refreshing high school life, when even I couldn't see myself doing?

Well, the school term did just start after all.

"Hm, well...I don't know what'll happen later on. I'll try enjoying whatever I can."

And so I answered with reluctance and delusion.

The train continued to race straight forward through the night streets.

There was the working class packed in crowds at the stations I passed by, waiting to get home quickly.

I, or we, again arrived at the city, and we would be reaching the station soon. It was the same the previous week; it felt that 2 hours and 30 minutes passed by quickly with just Nitadori and me chatting with each other.

"I'm getting off first today then."

I said."

"Thanks. Please do so."

And Nitadori answer, before continuing,

"May I...ask something else from you."

Her face's different from the usual expression she showed when she asked me.

She would give me the expression of a real interviewer when she asked me of my history.

But at this point, she had the face of a kid visiting relatives in January.

"It's not something really big."

That definitely was a lie. I had a premonition, but I asked,

"Anyway...let's hear you out..."

"Thanks. Erm, it's really not something big. I really have no intention of causing you trouble, sensei, but I do want to get permission from you."

She started off delightedly with with a long introduction.

I really couldn't imagine what she would saw. To be honest, I was scared.

No, no matter how scared I was, she probably wouldn't be saying 'I want to kill you! Now please die!' or something like that.

Whatever she said couldn't be any scarier than death itself.

While I prepared myself, Nitadori said,

"It's my turn for recitation next Thursday."

The 'recitation' we're talking about here—

Would be the class routine arranged at the beginning of the language class by our teacher, twice weekly, on Monday and Thursday.

That probably was something our aged language teacher came up with on a whim (or so I think).

"Anything is fine here. Just bring your favorite novel and recite in front of the class"

That was what we had to do. We had to do it in 3 minutes minimum, 10 minutes maximum.

I never did the statistics, but I feel that more than 90% of us hate this period.

The order was decided through lots, so I didn't know Nitadori was to do it next Thursday.

To avoid anyone forgetting the order once someone finished with the recitation, the teacher will definitely mentioned who would be doing the next two sessions. I suppose my consciousness was dressed to Reputation during the session today.

Speaking of which, I guess it's my turn soon after.

I remember it's also on Thursday, probably 3 or 4 weeks later. Got to check the notebook.

I really like books. However, I really am bad, and I really hate, reciting in front of others.

Of course, I probably will be reciting the same things as the other students if it's my turn, and cautiously choose works from famous authors,

'How many times does K have to die?'⁶

Or

'Cat again?'⁷

Or

'Hasn't Melos been running too much!?'⁸

And give them 3 minutes to think about it.

6 Natsume Sōseki's Kokoro

7 Natsume Sōseki's 'I am a Cat'

8 Ozamu Dazai's 'Run, Melos'!

As for which books they are, I'll just have to decide it on the day prior to it. No matter what sort of joke it was, even if the world was to end the next day, or even if someone was to point a gun at my head,

I had no intention of reciting 'Vice Versa'.

I never thought of that before.

And I didn't intend to think of such a terrifying thing—

W-wait...

Eh?

No...

Don't tell me...

Perhaps...

Nitadori...

I guess anyone could have seen that my face was completely frozen.

"So I say,"

The one person closest to me threw a megaton bomb at me with a smile,

"It's fine for me to recite 'Vice Versa', right?"

The broadcast indicating the train's arrival at the terminal buzzed in my mind.

I had to clearly state my rejection at this moment.

This girl, Eri Nitadori, would do it.

She would recite my novel right behind me.

And with the clear, beautiful voice, she would recite it so fluently, with so much emotions.

She would definitely do that.

I could tell.

I understood from the eyes. Those eyes.

That was the expression Nitadori was showing. On first glance, she seemed to be smiling really delightedly, and that was the same deep within her heart.

Thus, I had to tell her decisively at this point.

I had to state my refusal.

Of course, she would be reading the lines I created with vigor during the after record, and I would be listening by the side. This and that would be two different matters altogether however.

The answer I had to give Nitadori was 'no'.

I had to answer that.

To answer that as an upperclassman, and as a man.

"Nitadori..."

"What is it, sensei?"

To answer this bespectacled girl who's tilting her head cutely, I took a large breath,

"I'm willing to do anything you ask me, so please spare me on this already."

The words I then said naturally became respectful.

Chapter 4 – May 1, I Taught Her

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

The 'near-death experience' referred to the swirling lights that could cause movie film to move.

Modern people would use such an expression 'a fatal near-death experience', and some would even shorten it to describe the moment 'when people continued to recall the past before they died'.

I once read it in the books.

People would quickly see their past memories before they died.

It was said to be because the mind was searching for a certain something at full speed.

Seeking for a clue to escape the crisis from their past experiences.

Thus, I vividly recalled the past.

Recalling everything that happened from the first time I met her, till this point.

May had arrived.

The first week was commonly dubbed as 'Golden Week', but this day and the following day were still normal days. I had to attend classes on this day, and to visit the After Record the the following day.

After school, I changed from my uniform into plain clothes, and got on the same Limited Express train as usual.

The passengers on this day were a lot more than the previous week. It's Golden Week, and there are many dressed up for hiking.

Having already anticipated this, I queued earlier than usual, and managed to secure the usual seat right at the back, placing the luggage right beside it.

There was still some time until the train departed. I wondered if Nitadori would wait till the train departed before coming over as per usual, so I continued to wait leisurely, without any worry

A few days ago, I realized,

Did Nitadori deliberately wait until the last moment to arrive at the platform, and came in from the other carriages?

This station was a little distant from school, but there were still students who would head to school from there. If any particular person was to see Nitadori and me walking side by side with each other at the platform,

“What are these two doing?”

There surely would be such rumors. As both of us would take leaves every Friday, I didn’t have belief that I could fool others if I was to be questioned.

And if she really did put in such thought—

I surely would have to thank Nitadori here.

I suppose it was because of my manly plea that she did not choose ‘Vice Versa’.

What did she choose then? Surely there wasn’t anyone who didn’t know what it was. The answer’s ‘Momotaro’.

She brought a picture book directed for children,

“A long, long time ago, at a certain place—”

And recited from the beginning.

It really was a ‘professional prank’.

With much poise and care, she narrated the text. Her voice was ostensibly a textbook example, each word spoken with such clarity there was no way any word could have been mistaken.

The lines themselves were really exciting. Nitadori showcased all her acting talents, not withholding anything at all, using different voices for the old granny, the old grandpa, Momotaro, the dog, monkey, pheasant and the demons.⁹

I was looking forward, so I really couldn’t see her, but she probably was acting with her entire body like what professional voice actors will do. I could see my classmates look on, completely flabbergasted.

“Congratulations, congratulations.”

Eri Nitadori’s solo performance ended after 6 minutes and 34 seconds.

⁹ And the monk, the pig, and whatever Sha Wujing is



For us, who did not pay a single cent hearing this, we were first stunned momentarily, and then we applauded.

The teacher praised her exuberantly with grandeur words, and simply continued,

"Now then, the next one will be Suzuki, and after that Hisakawa."

That Suzuki who'll be following up after Nitadori really is very pitiful here. As for who that Suzuki, I don't even remember how he looks like now.

After class, the girls were gathered around Nitadori; some boys joined in too.

I decided to get up a little later for a stroll.

Many of my classmates were hailing Nitadori for how amazing she was,

"Have you acted before?"

Someone posed Nitadori this question, and she answered,

"Actually, I did join the drama club in my previous school, and I really put in a lot of effort practicing my recital acting. The teacher was strict, but I did recite the story very well today, so I wonder if he'll praise me."

"Eh?" "Oo" I heard such voices. Now that she mentioned it, I recalled her specifically stating in her self-introduction that she transferred in from the previous year. I had no idea exactly where she was prior to that.

"Aren't you going to join the drama club?"

A certain male classmate asked that.

Anyone would have thought about that—if they didn't know about her job at that moment.

"I decided not to join a club due to various reasons."

Nitadori replied with an answer that could barely be considered one.

While I intended to stop eavesdropping and get up,

"Why aren't you around on Fridays? Is it related to the various reasons you mentioned?"

A certain girl, poor in comprehending the mood, asked without holding back. Hearing her tone, I suppose there was no malice at all.

"No, that's not it."

Nitadori responded curtly,

"Then what it is?"

And that girl pressed on with the question.

"Erm..."

She let out a slightly perturbed voice.

There's another classmate who's definitely never around on Friday here, but it seemed that classmate wasn't being noticed in any way. My presence is so small it's shocking, and only in this situation did it help me out here.

But I was still worried if I would end up distracting her. I missed the opportunity to leave while pondering if I should quickly leave my seat.

At this moment, it'll be worse for us if I'm to slip off here. While pondering over what I should be doing at this moment, Nitadori said,

"My dad's currently living alone in Japan, due to busy work, and not because my parents are talking about divorce here, you know?"

That was the first time I heard of such matters.

But even so, I practically knew nothing about her.

"But I can only meet him in Tokyo on Friday, so I have to do so even if I have to take leaves from school. That's how it is."

Of course, all that has to be a lie. Her tone however was so overly natural and fluent, even I was about to blurt out, *I see, so that's how it is*, and believe her here.

As for the other classmates' reactions.

"Eh?"

"So that's why!"

"I see."

Hearing their reactions, I knew that they bought the story,

The acting skills of a professional voice actor's really amazing.

Feeling relieved, I went out for a stroll.

While strolling, I wondered.

Nitadori lied saying that she would head to Tokyo to spend Fridays with her family, and in fact, she went for her after record. She could have met her father after the after record was done, but that definitely was not the main reason.

Now then, what was that 'my parents are living separately' thing she just mentioned here?

I believed her completely when she said that. What happened on Friday however made me feel that she could be lying for the sake of it.

Nitadori's acting skills differed from any ordinary person. I couldn't determine the validity from her words.

In other words,

I knew nothing about Eri Nitadori other than she's 'the voice actress portraying Meek, and my classmate who's a year younger than me'.

Once I thought that much, my bad habit would kick in.

This bad habit here would refer to the 'delusional' habit, which I'm using as my money tree.

Who exactly was Nitadori?

Her relatives live in Japan, and she coincidentally takes the same ride as me because she wants to know about an author, and thought of all the questions to ask me. Was it all a lie?

Perhaps—

Perhaps Nitadori's a professional killer?

She has her sights on me, ready to kill me with a given chance. She plotted behind the scenes and became a voice actress, obtained a role, learned of my true identity, and joined my class?

That was not a coincidence, but something to be expected, right?

The reason why she asked me all these questions is that she wanted to know more about her target before taking action, right?

In that case, isn't it dangerous for me to turn my back on her?

"Wahahaha!"

A single boy suddenly began to laugh at himself, and two girls standing nearby, probably 1st years, immediately scampered helter-skelter.

Sorry to terrify both of you like that.

But that utterly foolish delusion I had was so interesting it made me laugh.

She intends to kill me if there's a chance?

I ate so much of the sea salt potato chips she provided, and even drank some tea.

If she really intended to kill me, I would have been dead 2, 3 times.

It's dangerous for me to turn my back on her?

I spent hours with my back facing her from Monday to Thursday.

The time she spent seeing my back was a lot longer than when I saw her.

The train began to rush.

The carriage became somewhat packed as the passengers were either headed out or home, and it became bustling.

During this situation, Nitadori came from the carriage behind, saying,

“It’s been a week, sensei. There’s a lot of people today. Thanks for reserving a seat for me.”

With one hand, she held onto the handle of the luggage bag she always used; in the other, she held out the bait meant for me, as usual.

“Here. This is the thanks for today.”

I took in the bag from the convenience store,

“Sorry for always,”

And answered in an old-fashioned manner.

Nitadori placed her bag behind her seat, tidied her hair, and sat down.

“Didn’t we say not to mention that?”

And again, she showed me a pretty smiling face on this day.

These snacks were really a relief to me, typically hungry at this time.

Actually, I would eat 2 pieces of toast before heading out every week. But as I’m in my puberty, I would gladly accept any food that appeared in front of him.

After guzzling down a third of the potato chips, I drank some tea.

“What shall I talk about today?”

I then turn to the seat on the right to ask. Even I too was a little surprised that I ended up initiating the topic so easily.

Nitadori immediately answered,

“I want to know how to write a novel?”

“What do you mean?”

This question's a little too vague, so I asked.

“Well...sensei, didn't you say 'I'll tell you about writing a novel next time'? I want to know how to do that, the specifics of writing a novel. For someone who never wrote a novel like me, I didn't know how to write such a novel.”

“I see...so we're going upstate in such a state?”

I muttered out my true thoughts.

“What?”

Nitadori tilted her head, asking,

“Ah, sorry. Just a simple word pun. Maybe you'll understand looking at the words.”

“...Oh!! You're like an author to be able to come up with such words on the fly.”

“Because I am an author.”

I ended up saying these words again this week.

Nitadori quickly adjusted her glasses with her right hand,

“Now then, please explain how a professional author begins to write.”

“Okay then...”

To be honest, I only entered the profession for 2 years, and the term 'professional author' really was very discomforting to me. But even so, since I'm in this job for a living, that should be a term I should be using for myself, even if I'm a professional.

But even so, I did have a thought about Nitadori 'a professional voice actor's really amazing!'. I guess this applies to both of us.

I decided to tell her how I wrote a novel,

“There's something I have to be clear with you first.”

“What is it?”

“No matter the number of authors, there's at least that number of methods to write. Right now, I'm pretty much just going to talk about 'the method I use'.”

“Understood.”

How does one write a novel?

As I had just mentioned, the method differs accordingly per person—

The one I used was the one I mastered while creating 'Vice Versa'.

Based on the order, that should be the most suitable.

First, I had to come up with the plot.

Plot.

This word in English can mean a conspiracy, a plan, but beyond that, there is the meaning of a structure, a scenario. Of course, when I (and the other authors) use this term, we would be talking about the latter.

I once searched up the definition of the term 'plot' on the internet. Strictly put, the definition seemed very complex.

Leaving that definition aside, I would typically think of it as 'a summary of the story' when coming up with this term.

In 8th grade,

"I see! So I need to think of a story!"

That was what I realized, but nowadays, I would not use the term 'story'.

I didn't know when I started, but I started using the term 'plot' instead.

"A plot, I think, is a framework, a blueprint of a novel."

"Okay."

"I don't think there's a definitive correct answer in the amount of plot. The file 'Vice Versa' was called 'a story of one transported to the other world, becoming an immortal', and that can be said to be the simplest summary of the plot. In any case, just understand that as 'the protagonist heads to the other world and becomes an immortal.'"

"I see. But the construction of the plot isn't always that simple, right?"

"Of course. There are times where I have to be clearer in explaining the plot, especially when explaining to the editor-in-charge."

The first step of writing a novel is to propose a plot, and I do think there's 2 ways to go about doing it

One of them is,

"Propose a plot for something that is to be written next time."

This would be what can be considered a storage, and I can go about writing it a little simpler as it's just something only I need to understand. It's fine to keep it simple even if I only have a few major points. That was the plan for the file called 'Vice Versa'.

Soon after, the contents of the novel gradually existed, and there was no need for me to keep expanding on the ideas I thought of (if there are ideas I can think of, naturally, I'll record them first)

"A story of people living underwater, and venturing the land."

"A futuristic crime story."

"Human dolls begin to move and started attacking humans."

I'll simply record such ideas down once I think about them, even if it's just a simple concept of a single line or sorts, and it's an asset I may be able to use in the future. My computer contains many of such ideas

Another method of composing plots would be,

"The author comes up with ideas to the editor-in-charge, telling him what the author intends to write."

In this situation, the idea's the blueprint, a proposal to a business partner that conveys 'I want to write this. What do you think?'

The writing would also different accordingly based on the authors. Of course, I understood this well, having asked other authors myself.

Some will basically come up with short ideas comprising of one liners.

In contrast, others will come up with long ideas, as long as a novel itself.

Some will come up with a document that's like a report, clearly and concisely stating various factors like 'what happened? How will the characters act?' (like me)

In contrast, others will start writing the characters' emotions in this plotting phase, and edit their works.

"In that case...the author won't start writing without obtain the editor-in-charge's permission, right?"

Nitadori asked.

This is just my own experience, and also what I heard from the editors of other light novelists. I prefaced with this, and,

"Typically yes. But there are exceptions."

In my case—

Leaving aside the submitted entry that was completed, what happened afterwards, beyond the second volume of 'Vice Versa' was,

"Typically, I'll begin writing after all the ideas I proposed have been approved. I'll send a message over through email conveying my ideas 'I intend to write the next volume like this. The characters will act like this, new characters will debut, these are the parts to shock the readers, and this is the ending'"

My house was connected to the internet, and I began to make contact with the editor-in-charge through email. I didn't think this answered the questions though, so I didn't mention it.

"The amount of plot I need to write differs per volume...but they aren't very long. A short one's about a dozen lines or so, and even if it is a little longer, it's not more than one pocket book spread page, or 2 pages."

"That's considered short, right?"

"I really don't know. I think this is the only thing that differs..."

"There's something I'm a little curious about. You just said that you'll 'typically come up with plots. Does this mean that you didn't do that for a certain volume/'"

I nodded.

"That was the case for the 7th volume."

Nitadori, whom I'm really grateful to for reading all my published works, immediately thought,

"It's the story of the 'Moving Country', right?"

The 7th volume of 'Vice Versa', the 4th volume of 'Side Shin', describes the story of a large moving country.

The stage was set in the most advanced country in Reputation. The country is 3km long, 1km wide, and moves on numerous caterpillars.

This country is equipped with massive mechanical arms, and spinning drills in the front; it can grind and level any land, obtaining all the resources. Once it arrives at a place, even the mountains will be leveled, and all that's left would be a barren land.

Typically, the country would only excavate minerals from areas with few people, and certainly would not cause trouble for other countries. Once a coup d'etat occurred however, the country harbored an ambition to rule over Reputation given the scientific power they possessed.

And Sin took action to stop that country's ambition.

Shin's mission was to infiltrate the country, die over and over again, and approach the central area of the country.

"Yeah, this is the only story I wrote without actually thinking of the plot."

"Erm...why's that? And how did you do it?"

I tried recalling that certain day, answering,

"After having my meal, I just spent the time watching TV, and then I saw a large German excavation machine. That gigantic machine was called a 'Bucket Wheel Excavator', more than 200m long. I know such a thing exists, but it was the first time I actually saw that thing in action. Have you seen one before, Nitadori?"

Nitadori shook her head as her eyes stared at me. The sight of the glasses moving was a little amusing.

"This monster gigantic, long-necked dragon-like machine moves on caterpillars, yet the shape's very complicated. It's like a mesh of factories jammed together."

Once I said this, I felt it was better for her to see a photo. It really is difficult imagining the appearance just from describing it.

I fish out my smartphone from my pocket, and begin searching for pictures using the search term 'bucket wheel'.

"This is it."

I handed the smartphone to Nitadori so that she could see.

Once she took it, she scrolled through the phone a little.

"Hm..."

She probably didn't have much interest in the machine (well, it's normal, since she's a girl), so her reactions' lukewarm as she returns me the phone.

Keeping the phone, I said,

"Once I saw that gigantic machine just grind and level the ground, I had an idea 'the enemy's going to invade in the next volume', and then I began work. Immediately."

"So, 'immediately', as in?"

"It's as the term implies. The show wasn't finished, but once I saw the part introducing that machine, I immediately shut the TV, and added a new file in the computer called 'a story about a massive country', beginning to write the story out. I didn't think of the structure at all; at first, I started to describe a massive country that's very hostile, where Sin and his ministers were glaring at it, and then Shin came...after that, as for what happened later, I just typed out what I thought. I didn't think of the structure even at the very end, just writing and thinking 'the story will develop this way, and then that way'. I didn't care about how much I wrote, I just wrote."

"..."

Nitadori frowned a little, remaining silent.

Is she terrified by this unreasonable, illogical method of writing. I wondered worriedly.

"You managed to write a novel so suddenly...what do you have to do to do such a thing...?"

Contrary to my expectations, she's very impressed.

But even so, I could only answer,

"Well...I just had an inspiration."

I did pause to think of the plot midway through, but I kept writing for another 2 weeks and 3 days before I finally finished it.

"Really unbelievable..."

Nitadori looked like she saw magic as she stared at me.

I suppose I can take that as praise, but this is all what I did, and what I could do, so I really can't feel proud about it.

I can't act at all (and I never acted), and I feel that Nitadori's powerful recitation was much better than what I can ever do.

"Erm...the 7th volume's just an exception. Normally, I'll think of a plot, and once the plot's all smooth flowing, I'll begin to write."

I said, and decided to proceed with the topic.

Regarding the process of writing a story, I only touched upon the first step.

The train conductor today's still a woman, and she came to check our tickets a lot later than usual. Once it's done, I began eating the potato chips, and gulped some tea.

"Now then, leaving the exception aside...assuming that I finished a volume's worth of concepts and submit it to the editor-in-charge, and that the editor-in-charge finds it interesting and asks me to write."

"Uh huh."

"I'll have to begin writing, to actually get down to composing the story."

After coming up with the manuscript, the next step will be to write the story.

But even so, the step's as the term implied, to actually focus on writing the story with determination.

Plotting is just deciding the main points, so there are a lot of issues I have to write and decide.

"No, I have to correct that. There's a need to decide on certain aspects while writing, and that'll be a lot more than what's already decided in the plot. For example, when manuscripting, I haven't decided on stuff like 'the guest characters' names."

"Why? I thought you'll decide on the characters that'll appear in a story before writing them in."

"I suppose some authors will do that, but that's not me. It's a different case for me though. While important characters are different...I'll prefer to wait until a character debut and pause to think of a name rather than to decide the names of all the characters that are to appear before writing. As for why—"

"Why?"

"Once the plot's basically decided, I'll begin to write. If I have to begin writing after confirming everything else...I feel that I won't be able to start writing."

If I've to compare it to a plan for a trip.

Some may plan this way,

"I'll try spending a week visiting Kyoto this time, venture around all the shrines. I want to go to this temple and that shrine, I want to eat that. If there's still time, I want to do something. At latest, I need to be back before a certain time."

And some may plan this way,

"Take the Shinkansen on Monday, reach Kyoto station at noon. First, we'll head to a certain temple, and stay until 3. At 4, we'll head to a certain hotel, take a shower a 5, have dinner a 7. The next day—"

My style of planning would probably be the former. I guess I won't be able to leave house if I have to come up with the perfect plan before going on a trip. I suppose I have to stop at a certain point rather than to just come up with the plan, say 'I'm leaving', and open the door.

"Speaking of which, I won't exactly follow the plot while writing."

I curtly stated.

'Eh?"

Nitadori's again taken aback.

"Wah!"

I too was startled by her as both of us exclaimed loudly. Luckily, it's loud inside the carriage.

"Is there a need to be so shocked?"

I whispered. Nitadori herself voiced out softly, but her voice's still audible,

"Of course! The plot's a blueprint and a plan, right? In other words, you don't complete your work based on the plan at all?"

I nodded firmly.

"Is it alright to do that...?"

"Currently, there's no problems."

I simply replied.

Surely I had to assemble the story according to the blueprint.

And that I had to write based on the plot.

If I kept worrying about that—

If I kept being restrained to be honest.

To put it bluntly, I really can't imagine myself being some author.

I don't know what others think, but even though I only have 2 years of experience as an author, I do write with the thinking 'the completed work is what I wanted to write'.

Assuming that the blueprint was 'a blue, light, small, streamlined sports car'.

Even if the completed car is 'the weight's still acceptable, the inside's wide, and it's an egg-shaped black wagon car', I don't think it's a failure (though the example itself is a little extreme).

"Ah, I completed this work."

That would be what I would think, and I would repeat it again. As long as I found the story to be interesting, I would submit the work to the editor-in-charge. ('interesting' is always the most important aspect. This alone is the one thing I will not budge on).

It's not uncommon for the plot to continually change when writing.

"How does it change?"

"For example...when I'm unhappy with my initial concept, or when I thought of a new plot development when writing. It's very common; I never counted the number of times it happened, but this is the most common."

"I see. What else?"

"The next one's an adjustment if the plot's too long. For example, I'm supposed to write a plot's worth of content, but after finding the story to be too story, I had to add some parts. Or maybe the opposite happened, and I wrote too much, so I had to cut off a few scenes. Using my experience, the latter's more common."

"In that case...don't you feel regret about 'being unable to write what you originally planned'?"

"I answered that question already, and I don't feel regret at all. I rather have a completed manuscript work than an idealistic idea. I'll try my best to edit to improve it though, of course."

"...I see."

"And also, I'll often change the character profiles."

"How?"

"I'll add new characters to cook up the atmosphere. In contrast, if I can't finish with the characterization, I'll think of reducing the number of characters. There are few female characters, so I need to change the gender for a few characters. The twist that 'this certain person's actually female' is always king, so I include this very often. Before then, when writing halfway through, I'll have thoughts of 'eh? It's probably more interesting to change this guy into a girl', and so I change what was supposed to be a guy into a girl."

"..."

I didn't know whether Nitadori's speechless because she's amazed or dumbfounded.

But this was how I completed my novel.

I wanted to avoid following a fixed path (plot concept) when writing and end up 'unable to reach the final destination', 'spending too much time', 'kept making myself tired'.

"And because of this...I can't keep sticking to the plot that can be changed midway through."

I felt I said some very ordinary things.

"Till now, I thought all authors would have a clear goal and write according to it."

I learned how amazed Nitadori was from the large eyes under the glasses and how shrill her voice became as a result.

"I too think...such people exist. But...I don't think all authors will do that."

"Haa...I'm shocked."

Writing is a tough, yet wonderful thing—

And there's still tough parts later. The actual writing itself is always the longest part.

I had to actually think through a large part of the story, and convert it into words.

At this point, I only knew how to write using a word processing software, so in fact, it should have been 'kept typing',

But to make things convenient, I'll continue to use the term 'write'.

"I suppose you know that the content of a story can be divided into the 'descriptions' and 'dialogue'. The descriptions refer to the narrations and the explanations, or in other words, anything other than dialogue."

I too found my own explanation to be very crude.

Nitadori nodded, and asked,

"Then, sensei, which do you find harder to write, the description or the dialogue?"

I answered,

"Hm, about that, it's definitely the description."

I did mention before that I could not write back when I was in 8th grade.

And the description was the part I couldn't write.

I feel that those aiming to be authors will reach the hardest hurdle, how to think (formulate) a story , and also,

How to do the descriptions for a novel.

"As I said before, I struggled over and over again, and barely managed to write it...but I was really suffering back then."

Looking at the back of the seat in front of it, I lamented.

It's interesting thinking of the times as a hammer after learning how to swim. The efforts put in back then definitely won't be for naught.

But even so, this isn't the time to be thinking back about what happened back then. I have to explain to Nitadori why the description is hard to write.

"Well, first...the aim of description is to explain to the readers what happens, so the author has to convey the intent to the reader"

"Okay.."

"And so, it's best to have a story that's simple yet easy to understand. In other words, there's no need for text that's extremely complicated. The ideal should be when the topics and the narratives are very clear, and there's no misunderstanding whenever any reads it."

Now then, if there's a question 'is the description all that simple in all the stories to be found in the world', the answer will be, of course not.

In fact, authors will added interesting similes, outstanding metaphors, correct grammar, and so on. In other words, authors will do all kinds of 'cosmetics' to present the text as more splendid, wonderful.

"I do feel this way. The decorating of a text is like an illustrator's fine strokes, the parts that'll emphasize the unique traits of each other. For example, just as 'some illustrators have delicate drawing styles', there are some authors who have delicate styles when writing. Also, some authors will include a large amount of metaphors, and some will keep it simple, yet refine it to be much prettier later on."

And thus—

Those wanting to write novels will think,

"I have to write that kind of story too."

And so, they end up unable to write it out.

For example, someone watched an Olympic event on TV, and was impressed by a participant's performance.

He thought of trying to start with that sport, and began to do so.

Is he however about to immediately perform as well as an Olympic representative? Of course not. Anyone will understand this.

"Why can't I run 100m in 10 seconds?"

"Why can't I hit bullseye all the time?"

"Why can't I leap elegantly between the uneven bars?"

I don't really think anyone will have such troubles.

In terms of novels however, I do feel that many people begin off, but have the frustration of 'why can't I write like this particular author'.

"Speaking of which...I was like that when I first started writing. Back then, I think I was seriously thinking 'I did read so many books, but why can't I write that kind of a story'..."

And saying that, I turn my eyes to the distant past.

"..."

Nitadori remained silent,

"Well, I guess, that's impossible..."

And amicably agreed with me.

"Yes, it's impossible. There are amazing geniuses who exist in this world however, and there are exceptions to be seen everywhere, so I don't dare to say it's absolute. Anyway, most of the people probably can't do it."

The main difference between the sportsmen in the example and writing is—

Basically, 'writing stories in Japanese' is something any Japanese can do.

Anyone can come up with a half-baked story, so they probably can imagine themselves writing a story like a novelist.

And then they got frustrated over being unable to write.

Before they gave up in the end.

"Then, as for 'what do I do in this situation'...or I should say 'how did I do it'..."

"Hm, how?"

"I started writing from those parts I could. That was back when I was in 8th grade, so I'll skip on the explanation—"

I realized.

Though I read a lot of novels till this point, I had yet to actually write a story myself. I could write a story in Japanese, but it was stupid of me to think that I could actually successfully write a 'Japanese novel' right from the beginning.

"So I'm saying isn't that 'if there's no bread, have some cake'. I feel that if I can't write a story that's more difficult, try writing something simpler."

"I see. Start improving on what you can do, huh?"

'Yeah. I feel that a simple text will do, so the one thing I focus most on is 'comprehensiveness', and I decided that I had to begin writing first.'

It's impossible to just imagine and write a story like a certain professional author. Thus, I'll start from 'a simple story that's easy to understand'.

And then, I completed the story first, before revising what I wrote over and over again.

I continue to spice up the simple text, like 'a little additional narratives', 'slight changes in terms', and so on. If I feel there's no need to do so, I'll naturally let the text remain as such.

Soon after, I ended up being able to write better than how I did when I first started off.

"And then, when writing, you're able to write better text...is that it?"

“Well, it can barely be considered as such if you're calling a text that can be called a novel.”

“You're being humble again. Do you still find writing the description very difficult.”

“Yeah, even now, I do think this way. I'll feel really frustrated writing the descriptions. I can do it, but I'll still ask myself, is this enough? Is there a more obvious way of showing this? And assuming that it's easy to understand, is there a better way of spicing this up in a way readers will find amusing? It's not difficult to edit a text when writing a novel.”

“I see.”

“But of course, I still have to meet the deadlines, so there's a certain time when I had to tell myself 'this is enough'. Till now, my method is still to reread the story 3 times, and if I don't find the story to be awkward in any way, I'll submit the script.”

After explaining till this point, I drank some tea, and Nitadori asked,

“Then, what about the dialogue? It's easier, but is it really that easy thinking about it?”

And I honestly answer,

“It's far easier than the descriptions. I'm always able to think of conversations easily..”

I always had delusions ever since young,

And in my delusions, the conversations took a large chunk of it.

I kept thinking back on the characters (myself included back then) having such cool, boisterous, or interesting conversations.

I myself am introverted and timid, and I'll be so tense whenever I faced anyone, wondering what to talk about. In my delusions however, I'm able to actually chat with others without holding back.

In an actual conversation, the other party actually exists. I didn't know what he'll say (though I had some guesses).

After hearing the conversation, I'll think of how to answer him, and continue to listen to him. This continuous process definitely isn't easy (and at this moment, I'll be much more fatigued than usual thinking about 'not wanting to hurt the other party', or 'not wanting to say anything rude').

For example, it's like 2 people having a serious Shogi match.

In my delusional conversations, I'm proceeding with all this myself, so I know what the other party will be saying.

For example, I'm playing Shogi by myself. I could cook up the atmosphere of the match and determine the victory. All the moves are dictated by my brain, so it's much easier than having an actual, serious match.

The reason why I'm bad at actually conversing with people in reality is probably because I'm too used to playing Shogi by myself. While under the misunderstanding that 'the conversation will probably go just as I think', whenever they say something unexpected, I'll end up not knowing what to say at all.

"But to me, you look like you're able to converse normally with ordinary people, and you are able to actually do it."

"That's because I'm basically answering questions...I think answering questions about myself is the simplest form of dialogue."

"Then, isn't that it!?"

"What?"

"What you talked about when describing the descriptions. Start from the simplest conversation, and then you'll soon improve!"

"Ah, that."

"Yes, that."

Though the conversation's full of relative pronouns, I'm glad to be able to talk to her without any concerns. As she had said, I probably never had any talent of talking with people right from the beginning.

Start slowly from the simplest part, and soon after—

"Erm, the conversations the characters in the novel have...is completely different from an actual conversation. I think this is the case not only for a novel, but also for anime or a drama script."

I racked my brain furiously, and said.

"Yes! I understand that!"

Nitadori agreed for the time being.

I'm glad. There's probably no one unhappy about being acknowledged by others. I once read in a certain book that the basic skill of getting on someone's good side through words is not to deny others.

"It's much more complete and easier to understand than an actual conversation, right?"

Nitadori gave the correct answer. I guess this is to be expected of a professional voice actress that's staring at the script all the time.

In fact, the conversation here is different from a conversation in a novel.

If one's to actually record an actual conversation and fill it out (or write it out), it's obvious that an actual conversation has a lot of colloquial and mistakes. It's really difficult to read text where every line's recorded.

It's after I searched through the internet that I learned that there are 3 methods to record dialogue and convert them into the words. 'transcribe', 'fluffing' and 'editing'.

'Transcribe' will mean adding all the sounds, including 'well', 'ahh', and all kinds of onomatopoeia, and they're all recorded into words. This is used when there's a need to accurately record the conversation.

'Fluffing' will be to remove those meaningless sounds, or make the bare minimum edits at the parts that are overly strange.

'Editing' will be as the term implies, to reconstruct the text into easy to understand sentences.

"I do feel that this also has something to do with the author's own preferences...but novels basically are 'edited manuscripts'. If I want to give a stammering feeling, I'll add terms like 'well'. If it's a text, I'll add ellipsis."

"Ellipsis", as in?"

"The punctuation used to contain sentences...used to describe silence."

"Eh! I didn't know that."

"It has 3 dots. Accurately put, there's a rule of thumb to put at least 2 or 4 of these. This punctuation however is based on the author's own preference, and it's the case too in publications other than light novels."

"What about yourself, sensei?"

"For me, I'll still follow the rule, to add two of these, 6 dots altogether. If there's a need to emphasize silence, I'll double that; in other words, I'll use 12 dots."

Speaking of ellipsis, I had a little urge to talk about how to write a story, the rules, and all sorts of stuff.

But it'll be way off topic in that case, so I held back.

"Is there anything to take note of with regards to other parts, like dialogue or anything? I want to know more about conversations."

Nitadori said. I guess this it to be expected of a voice actress.

"Now then, let's talk about a conversation in a novel. I do think there's a very big difference, other than the fact that 'the characters conversation are a lot more polished than an actual conversation'. That is—"

"That is?"

"Character conversations are not exactly meant for each other."

"Hm? Then, who are they for?"

Nitadori tilted her head, asking, and so I answered,

"For the readers."

"Ah...I see, so that's how it is..."

"For example, right now, I'm having a conversation with you on the train..."

"Yes."

Nitadori chimed in, seemingly happy about it. Is this my imagination? But even so, I can't understand what's there to be happy about. It's useless to worry about such things however, so I continued,

"If I'm a character in a novel...I won't be talking to you, Nitadori."

"...Hm, now that's definitely the case."

And now she's looking unhappy. I really can't understand her.

"The one I'm talking to is the reader. I'll be portraying this character, and convey to the readers what the author wants to express. That's the kind of impression. Ah, I think I'm getting a little obnoxious here. Sorry."

"No no. Then, am I talking to the readers too?"

I nodded firmly.

Nitadori then turned her stare to the top right corner of the carriage ceiling,

“Dear readers, hello there. If you find this book to be very interesting, please recommend it to your classmates!”

Her speaking voice was completely different from before, very cute. It can be described as the 'anime voice'.

I couldn't see from this angle—

So I didn't know what sort of expression Nitadori was showing on her face.

The carriage on May 1st is far more packed than how it normally was.

Many people got off midway through the trip, but there were also a lot of commuters on this trip. The free-seating carriage became lively.

There's still no seat in the one seated in front of us, but there's finally a young woman seated at the right side of the aisle, near the window.

In that case, we couldn't converse as we normally id.

And once I wondered that, the woman immediately put on her earphones to listen to music, and closed her eyes.

“Looks like...my sleep magic worked.”

Nitadori said with a serious face,

“Impressive.”

Sleep magic's the most basic of spells in 'Vice Versa', able to cause the inflicted party to be overwhelmed with a great urge to sleep, and prompt them to do so.

And this was a common spell Sin would use in the real world whenever he encountered a tough situation.

Nitadori asked me how I write, and at this point, I only answered the concept planning and a small part of writing itself.

“Well, in the process of writing, what's the next step?”

“Well...”

I start to ponder, and I had little thought,

“I'll digress a little. Is that okay?”

“Go ahead.”

“Now then, when I first started out, I would obviously follow a rough outline of the concept or the ideas I thought, and continue to write enthusiastically.”

“Okay.”

“I feel that writing is a job is something that can conceive all kinds of possibilities if you think hard, and yet continue to throw it away.”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“Well...the novel I had was conceived in my mind. At first, what developed was the ideas, and then, the concept will be formed. At that phase, my story's yet to take shape. That's because, as I had said, I'm not limited by the concepts when writing.”

“Uhum.”

“But once I continue to write, I'll decide on which parts I want to keep. Of course, there are times when I'll rewrite it, or I'll abandon certain scenes...but if I'm happy with the parts I've written, I'll keep that part.”

“Ah, I think I get what you're saying here, sensei.”

“Once I'm done writing a novel, the content will take care, and won't become another story altogether. At this moment, I'll give up other possibilities. The possibilities I give up on will be far more than the possibilities I chose. It's tough giving up on them, but I got no choice. If I don't give up on them, I won't be able to make choices.”

“Just like life.”

Nitadori said with a grim look.

I didn't intend to give such a massive impression; all I wanted was to describe 'how hard it is to give up'.

“Just like life.”

However, I decided to play along.

“Now then, we mentioned the plot, began written, and later...”

I wondered what I was to say next, muttering.

“Can I ask? When did you decide the title of the work? Who decides it?’

Nitadori took a gulp of tea, and reached her hand out to me.

“Ah, thanks. Now then, I'll explain this part first.”

“No problem. Go ahead please.”

I feel that the title's very important.

Either way, the first thing the reader wants to see first is the title and the author (in the world of light novels, the cover is as important too, but I'll leave that for another time). When picking a light novel title, I'm very particular about the readers' impression on the title.

When coming up with a title, it has to be impactful, and also easy to understand.

“Leaving aside the impact first, let's consider the ease of understanding the title. Assuming that there's a book titled 'a Certain murder', we'll be able to tell what kind of a story it is.”

“Yes, it's a detective novel, right?”

“Yes. This is a classic example, but I feel that all kinds of novels will have similar names, so in that way, the best way is to determine the title of the book. If I want to write a detective novel, I'll do that unless there's a situation where I can't compromise.”

“So, sensei, how did you decide on this light novel title?”

“Hm. In the world of light novels, the title—”

Can only be described as chaotic.

There are all kinds of titles, an entire variety of them.

Some titles are simple enough, including the protagonist's name.

Some titles are formed using the protagonist's name with another noun. 'OO's XX (OO no XX)' is quite common.”

There are also short phrases used to describe the world setting.

At a certain period, there were titles of four hiragana words with exclamation marks added at the back, including anime and manga.

And also, there's one that's often seen currently—

The extremely long titles that can be said to be sentences.

"Ah, yes, those extremely long names are really scary. If they need to be made into anime, when the news for auditions get circulated, everyone would be thinking in surprise, 'Woah, another long one!'"

"I feel that such titles are very popular due to the impactfulness that will leave a great impression. Also, they can add additional 'selling points' into the title, like little sisters, demon lord, class reps, maids, and so on, so I guess it's for convenience sake."

"Ohh...I guess this is a calm analysis only authors can do."

"But stories with extremely long titles isn't just for long titles. Such titles aren't really uncommon in sci-fi. Do you know the original title of the movie 'Blade Runner'?"

"No."

"'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sleep?' The Japanese version uses the direct translation, and the English title is this long. There are also some titles that are really long in movies, so I think the trend of titles being so long they're sentences don't simply appear in light novels."

"Hmm...then, sensei, will you use that kind of title?"

After pondering for 3 seconds, I concluded that no, I won't do that. Currently, there's an oversaturation of extremely long titles, so the impact has weakened, and it gets a little stale."

"No, I won't."

Nitadori chuckled, saying,

"I knew you'll say that. I do think that 'Vice Versa' is a wonderful title. It's short, but it conveys the setting well. When I first saw the cover, I was thinking 'wow'."

I wanted to thank her, but instead, I asked her,

"Nitadori...is your English fluent?"

I, who was supposed to be the one answering the questions all this time, actually took the initiative to ask her a personal question. Even I was shocked by this.

"Why...do you think that way?"

She asked.

It seemed she was more startled that 'I got it right', rather than me asking the question. And so, I honestly answered what I thought of,

"Hm, when I was looking for this English term, I realized that a lot of Japanese don't know this at all, and I heard that even the textbooks don't have it. It's commonly used in English conversations however. You knew what it meant the moment you saw the title...and I guess your English conversation skills might be decent."

Nitadori blinked the eyes under the glasses.

"...Amazing work, Sherlock."

Is her English fluent after all? Again I learned something about Nitadori.

"My English's decent, but it's nothing to be proud of, and I never mentioned it to others."

"Understood, I'll keep it a secret at school. Normally, I won't be talking to anyone anyway."

"You'll have an increase in number of friends soon! Hey...aren't you decent at English yourself? Do I try talking to you in English?"

"Did you forget the 'My Warld The Number First'?"

And while Nitadori was reining in her laughter, I informed her of the origin of the title 'Vice Versa'.

Once I had my world setting, and recorded down the plot—

"Ah, 'Vice Versa' does sound good."

I just had this feeling, and went along with using it.

As I said before, it's a term I learned from a certain movie. Ever since then, I kept remembering it..

As I said, I suppose most of the Japanese don't know this term, and that's why I named it as such.

In other words, I had it as a selling point,

"I don't know the meaning of the mysterious term, but it sounds cool."

If the word 'vice' is looked at as an ordinary word, it'll mean 'evil' in English. To a German reader, 'Weiß' would mean 'White'.

When I first started the content of the first volume, I had the English teacher teach Shin the meaning of the term Vice Versa.

I hoped that after the readers read the meaning of the book, they would have a 'I see, the title represents the setting of the world'.

"Ohh...so that means you actually thought hard about it before coming up with the name, right?"

Nitadori looked impressed at first, and then said,

"And you did that to actually reveal one of my secrets so discreetly...I never thought you had such intention."

I answered,

"Of course. When naming the title, I already expected that we'll be seated on this train 3 years later, on May 1st."

"As to be expected of you, sensei. You really have a way with things..."

Why however?

I suppose I'm not really good at the Manzai routine, but I could easily handle it if my partner's Nitadori.

I continue to explain about the book title, answering her the question of 'who names the book'.

"First off, the contest entry is obviously titled by the author."

"Okay."

"But after winning the award, it seems there's often a change in title."

I didn't change the title of the work before, so most of these is hearsay. To change the title of a work, there's 3 methods to this. 'the editor-in-charge does it', 'the author comes up with a new name', or 'both people do it'. (Also, there's an example, when the ideas are revealed for a public voting).

What will a modern author do?

It seems it'll be one of the three.

I heard the timeframe for naming a book isn't fixed, and it's decided based on the situation.

As for me, the title of my current work (series), 'Vice Versa' was conceived when I was coming up with the story, as I had said.

And this is what I heard from the editor-in-charge and other authors—

Some will want to think of a cool title, and then expand their thinking from there.

Some will come up with the name when plotting the story (that's me).

Some can't think of the title at all, so they'll first try to come up with a placeholder title. Once the manuscript's done however, they'll decide on the actual title.

Sometimes, the placeholder titles will become the actual title because there aren't any other ideas.

And after hearing this,

"Hey, sensei..."

Nitadori gave a somewhat bemused yet serious look.

"Wh-what is it...?"

And while I answered so timidly, Nitadori asked,

"Sensei, if you have to write such a situation into a novel and give a title to it, what will you do?"

"Huuh!?"

This extremely gaudy question caused me to let out an awkward cry.

"In other words, if you have to come up with a story where you're a protagonist, what'll you call it?"

"...Me—?"

"'Me'?"

"I already fired myself..."

"I know you said it already! If you're to think about it again, what'll you do? In fact, at this age, you're already a light novel author, and your work's adapted into an anime. That's just like a light novel protagonist, isn't it?"

"...I never thought of that before."

"How about it? If you try thinking about it, what will you title your book?"

"..."

I began to think.

After thinking over and over again, letting Nitadori wait for about a minute, I muttered,

"Erm, 'No Longer Human'?"

Nitadori was a little peeved to hear such an answer, saying,

"Isn't that blatant copying?"

"Then, 'No Longer Protagonist'?"

“Like it has changed much!”

The train moved into the city.

It's already dark outside, and the carriage's starting to buzz.

I already explained the concept planning, writing, and the title. What's next?

Do I start from the part after writing the script?

“Is there anything you'll pay particular note to when writing? Like something you have to pay attention to?”

Nitadori asked.

“Other than the deadline?”

“Other than the deadline.”

“Hm...there are a few things.”

It's trivial, but since she asked, I thought of it, so I decided to ask her.

When writing, I'll follow the 2 pages, 34 lines, 42 characters per line 'Dengeki Bunko format', horizontally.

I'll occasionally write the text in vertical manner, and then use the 'print preview' function in Word to view the publication layout when converted into Dengeki Bunko format.

Some may think, in that case, why don't I simply do it in vertical format instead. As I had explained it long ago however, I'm already used to landscape, so I don't intend to change that.

When checking through the layout, if I find the words to be too crammed,

I'll increase the name of lines.

“Eh? Why do you do that?”

“Because the priority is 'readability'.

A light novel's the first novel most people would have read in their lives.

That was the impression I had through the fan letters I got and the online book reviews. To me, who grew up living with books, I really was surprised that 'many read books for the first time after entering Middle or High School'.

But any point is a starting point.

And after saying this, I realized I got many things 'I have yet to start on'.

Once I realized that light novels are 'an entrance that conveys the interesting aspects of novels', and bore the mission to guide people to interact with books, I started to have an idea.

For the sake of those who have yet to touch books, I want to try my best to make my work easy to read.

For those who have yet to have the habit of reading books, what kind of books are easy to read?

I feel,

First off, the sentences; it's best if I abstain from using too many difficult sentences. As I said before, I actually fulfilled this, unexpectedly.

The next one should be the impression the pages give a reader.

Rather than cram pages with words,

I suppose it's better to leave some spaces when at certain intervals.

When writing, I'll occasionally end up in situations where 'I'm in a groove'.

That's a wonderful moment where my thoughts simply flow.

During that situation, I don't have time to think of aligning the text, and the words will often be cramped.

Thus, I'll look at the text calmly, and then add in more spaces.

When writing, I typically don't adhere to a certain amount of text per chapter. At most, I'm guessing a certain number of pages per part, (for 'Vice Versa', I'll divide each chapter as around 30 to 50 pages).

And so, the amount of spacing to increase the number of pages won't be much of an issue.

If it's like a magazine or a newspaper, the column size does have a limit, and I most probably can't do it as I please.

"I see. So you prioritize readability, and not let the words be too crammed. Anything else you take particular note for?"

After thinking for a few seconds, I answered,

"The names of the characters, I guess. I'm always bothered by it."

"Really? Bothered about what?"

"The one thing I really have to take note is to make sure the names don't clash with any real life celebrities or characters in other works."

"It's still tough having to come up with names for so many people, right? How do you come up with names for your own characters?"

"It seems like some will name characters according to certain rules. For example...I know that a certain manga has all its names based on prefectures."

"Then what about 'Vice Versa'? How do you go about naming it?"

"Other than Shin and Sin, there's basically no rules for most of the characters, especially the characters in Reputation. I'll just use names that I think are cool. Characters like Pluto are as such. As for 'Side Shin', the characters with Japanese names are actually, randomly named...just as long as they don't clash."

"So...how do you check on that?"

"It's easy to do so now. Just search through the internet for any names you think of."

"I see!"

"I'll use it if it's not a name or family name that clashes with characters from other works, or any name that clashes with any celebrities in real life."

"Then...what about Meek?"

The eyes under Nitadori's glasses were as serious as she showed during the After Record.

At this point, a strong impulse arose in my heart.

Ah, I see.

This person in front of me is the voice actress portraying Meek.



“Homunculi like Meek are the only exceptions. There's a rule to their naming.”

I answered, and Nitadori suddenly leaned her body and face towards me.

“What rules?”

Too close. The glasses are too close to me.

I tilted my body slightly back, and Nitadori too reverted back to her original position.

“What rules?”

She asked a second time. Looks like she really wants to know.

Well, it's to be expected. It's the character she's going to portray in the future, and it's the first official named character she's acting the role of.

Tomorrow, Meek will be appearing for the first time in the After Record for the 5th episode.

She'll debut for a few minutes, and actually talk to Shin.

I've been wondering, have I actually told anyone how I got Meek's name.

I didn't remember if I actually said this to the editor-in-charge.

I also didn't remember if I actually mentioned it during the anime script meeting.

If I've yet to tell anyone,

Nitadori will be the first one to know.

Well, I guess it's fine to tell her this.

I immediately had an answer.

She's a colleague, and someone who'll keep secrets. There won't be problems even if I do tell her.

It's noisy inside the carriage, but for added safety, I hushed my voice as much as possible to answer her.

“The names of the Homunculi actually originate from Russian.”

“Eh...Russian...?”

“Before that, do you know of the 'Naming Dictionary'?”

“No.”

She shook her head slightly, and I explained to her.

As the term implied, the naming dictionary is a dictionary for names.

It records all sorts of terms in languages of more than 10 countries, marketed as 'Convenient for naming products, companies and shops'.

The first column's basically English, followed by French, German, Italian, Spanish, and so on. The number of languages recorded in each book's different.

I too have such a naming dictionary. When coming up with names for 'Vice Versa', I'll find a good katakana name for characters.

And as this is really convenient.

I do feel that for authors, or anyone aspiring to be authors, it's not a bad thing to have a naming dictionary with them at all times. The naming dictionary can also be classified for ordinary types, fantasy worlds, or even military.

The name МИГ was what I found when I was flipping through the book. It sounded cute, so I memorized it.

Readers would often mention this name in their review, but I want to say, the name МИГ wasn't meant to imitate that famous voice synthesis software cum popular character.

"Then what does the name mean in Russian?"

Nitadori's stare was intense. I could feel the rage from the anxiety she had after I explained the naming dictionary to her.

I didn't want to get bitten to death, so I answered,

"It means 'instance'."

"Instance..."

Nitadori muttered softly..

"Instance..."

And again she did.

Once she understood the meaning of the name of the character she's portraying.

I don't know what this voice actress is actually thinking.

But what I'm thinking inside is, 'Good thing I didn't come up with an indecent name for this character'.

The other homunculi are also named based on Russian, and currently, there's more than 10 of them.

Свет (Svet) means visible light, and that's still decent.

Лес (Les) means forest. Speaking of which, this particular homunculus is in the country of the deserts, so the setting's different from the name, at least.

Доска (Doska) means blackboard. He's a handsome young man, but his name is a blackboard.

Складки (Skladki) means folds. She's a pretty girl

Гриб (Grib) actually means mushroom.

Пугало (Pugalo) actually means scarecrow...

That was close.

I nearly ended up in a situation where I'll be saying,

"The name of the character you're portraying actually means 'mushroom' (or 'scarecrow')!"

That really was close.

"Instance..."

Nitadori kept her head lowered, and I added on with the explanation,

"In English terms, it'll mean 'moment'. I think it's a similar pronunciation in Russian, and the reason I actually remembered it well is because before I actually confirmed the name, I did check for info on the internet. Meek sounds cuter though, so I decided to use it."

This really is off topic, which I never said to Nitadori,

'In Russian pronunciation, '**МиГ**' can be read as 'MiG'.

As for 'MiG', that'll be the famous fighter jet manufacturer. The company manufactured lots of fighter jets, like the MiG-25 or the MiG-29.

Anyway, the company has nothing to do with this 'Meek'.

Some fans will submit their illustrations onto the internet, and one of them has Meek standing in front of a MiG-21. I really like that illustration, so I had it saved.

There's another thing I haven't told Nitadori.

Meek actually means 'Instance', so I had a thought that sooner or later, it'll become a topic somewhere.

It's rare to get a meaningful name, so when I talked about 'Instance', I'll add the name 'Meek' in furigana by the side, coolly emphasizing this point.

I thought of that, but I haven't used that.

If I don't hurry with it, I guess I won't be able to use it even if I want to.

Thinking about that, I reached my hand towards the tea by the windowsill.

"Thanks for telling me all of this. I had been wondering about it all this time."

"Eh?"

The formal language from the seat on the right side really shocked me.

Turning my head aside, I found Nitadori there, staring at me.

"?"

Once she saw my surprised look, she too was taken aback. Looking at her expression, it looks like she hadn't realized she used formal language.

I was thinking that it wasn't good to pursue the matter, so I did my best to say in an earnest voice,

"Erm...don't mind me. I'm looking forward...to the After Record tomorrow."

"Yes! Please allow me to do that! I will do my best tomorrow!"

Again, she spoke in formal language.

I felt a shock in face of the sudden bombardment of formal language. This conversation's too impactful, so I'll occasionally add such a writing style in my work. I never thought I'll actually get this experience however.

Nitadori,

Probably got into 'work mode'.

To me, I really wish she would stop with the formal language as before.

While thinking about it for a little while, she suddenly stood up, saying,

“Please excuse me for a while.”

And then, she immediately went through the automatic doors behind us.

The train passes through some tunnels that are rather long, moving through smoothly. It's a pretty, lush mountainous area around here, but it has become rather dim outside the window, so there's not much scenery to be seen even after leaving the tunnel.

It's still noisy inside the carriage. Looks like Nitadori had cast a really powerful spell, for that woman's still affected by it. I hope that she's getting off at the terminal however.

Nitadori has yet to return. I'm not really picky about her taking too long; it's useless to be picky about it if she's headed to the toilet.

I was only thinking,

“Ah, so nice.”

Potato chips go best with sea salt after all.

“Ah, kept you waiting.”

Once I was done finishing the potato chips, Nitadori managed to recover, and returned. Did she wash off her 'work mode' with water? Or did she hand it off to someone else?

As usual, she had her hair tidied, let her hair drape in front and behind her chest, before sitting down quickly.

“Now that we mentioned 'concept, writing, title, character naming'—”

Nitadori said,

“Can I conclude this as 'this is a volume done' for the time being?”

“No problems.”

“Then, what will an author do next? Is there anything to take note?”

Listening to the question, I pondered.

Nitadori's asking some really detailed questions. Is she planning to write a novel herself?

But I did remember her saying not long before 'I don't intend to register'.

In that case, I guess a certain acquaintance of hers want to be an author for some reason.

Or maybe that she's already an author, and I don't know? Is she a voice actress and an author? Is she planning to get intel beneficial to her from a rival?

Once I had my delusions till that point, I decided to return to reality.

"Now then, assuming that I've completed a volume worth of manuscript, it's now the work to check through it, and then complete the elaboration (or bump and knock)."

"Bump and knock?"¹⁰

Nitadori asked.

It's a term taught in elementary language classes, and I thought everyone knew this.

Perhaps Nitadori was on leave that day, so I explained.

Elaboration would be to read through the text over and over again, and add on.

There is a origin to this term. A certain Chinese poet was wondering,

"Which one do I use? Bump or knock?"

While walking, he bumped into an official and his men.

That official, a man of literature himself, said,

"Knock' is better."

And having said that, the poet decided.

So, by connecting the two words, that term came about.

"Eh, it's the first time I knew about this. Thanks."

"Erm, do mind it. Assuming that I'm done with writing a novel, the bump and knock's done for the moment."

So what will I do next? I'll send the manuscript to the editor-in-charge, get him to read through, an check through it.

For practically all the authors, including me,

When we talk about 'sending the manuscript', we're talking about email.

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I'll attach the Word document to the email, and press the send button.

Thus, there's no need for the editor-in-charge to come over and get the manuscript, and I don't have to send the actual physical copy over.

I can send the file from anywhere in the world. With a computer and internet around, I can work anywhere in the world.

"You aren't in Tokyo at the moment anyway, sensei. Are there many authors working outside the capital?"

"Amongst the authors I see at the end of year party, most of the authors are living in Kanto, including Tokyo, followed by Kansai. There are a few living far away. The end-of-year party is a rare chance to get all these people gathered."

"I see."

I'll get back to talking about email attachments.

Before adding the word document to the email, I'll add '111' to the back of the file, before sending it out.

This refers to the '1st manuscript'. A single '1' is enough, to avoid mixing up the volume numbers, I'll add three repeated numbers before sending it out.

"And once the editor-in-charge's done checking, and you edit it, it'll become the 2nd manuscript?"

"That's the case. I'll add '222' at the back of the file."

"Then, how many manuscripts do you have to do?"

"Well, before this...I think it's better to explain to you the discussion meeting and the review. What do you think?"

"In that case, go ahead with it, sensei."

The editor-in-charge will be in charge of checking through the manuscript, and review it.

Writing's difficult, but so is review. Sometimes, reviewing the work's worse than writing it.

After I send the manuscript, the editor-in-charge will have to spend days, or even a week to check through it. If he can't get the time to do it, this period will be lengthened.

And then, the editor-in-charge will notify me of a meeting time and date. There are mainly two methods to this,

One of them is to hold a meeting through the phone, and the other's to meet face to face.

"I can understand a meeting through the phone...but meeting directly will mean, that the editor-in-charge will be looking for you?"

I shook my head,

"I think that some authors and editors-in-charge will do this, but I haven't done that. I've always been going to Tokyo. I'll hold meetings through the phone sometimes, but to be honest, I think a face to face meeting's better. There are some parts in particular that need editing, and a face-to-face meeting right from the get go will do."

I'll head to Tokyo according to the date.

2 years ago, when I was in 10th grade, all the meetings will be held on Friday nights. For me however, I'll ask the editor-in-charge to spare time for me.

After school, I would hurry towards the station, take the Rapid Express before this one, which leaves at around 3pm.

And so, I'll be able to reach the editorial branch at Idabashi before 7pm.

We would use the conference table beside the editorial branch. I heard that some will hold meetings in restaurants or cafe, but to be honest, I really don't want to do this, for I'm worried that the people will eavesdrop on what we're talking about, or things get leaked. Anyway, I can't hold the meetings with a peace of mind.

The meeting's typically around 2 hours long, and if longer, about 3 hours.

"That's rather long...so in detail, how do you proceed with the meeting?"

"First, erm, the meeting basically starts with the editor-in-charge saying 'this is very interesting', or something, I guess? That'll let me feel relieved, since it's not a situation where, 'I can't use this story at all'."

"Can't use at all? That means—"

"Yeah, that's how it is. It's scary if I can't use the story at all. Anyway, it means 'this story's meaningless, so I can't use it'."

"In that case...what'll happen next?"

"Of course, I'll have to rewrite."

"Everything?"

“Everything.”

“Have you encountered a situation where you can't use the story at all...?”

Actually I haven't got this at all.

So when I said that, it's just me imagining things.

As I had said before, once I submit my concept, once the editor-in-charge agrees with my ideas, I'll begin writing.

But even so, it's as what I said before. It's very rare to have the original concept being exactly the same as the manuscript.

No matter how interesting the concept is, if the novel isn't interesting, or if the completion's too little, or if any of these two occur, the editor-in-charge might not use this at all.

After chatting with other authors, I learned that there are actually many authors who had stories that were scrapped.

Will this happen to me some day?

I felt terrified every time.

“How interesting—”

Even though such a reply will give me relief, I still can't let my guard down.

Every single time, the editor-in-charge will pose me lots of issues.

“So, how does the editor-in-charge raise them?”

“I feel that at first, they'll start from the entire plot process. This is the part with the most need for change. Both the editor-in-charge and I will use the term 'Drastic changes'; this is the part that really needs a lot of changes, so even if all the trivial parts are pointed out, it's meaningless.”

“I see. Are there examples where you need drastic changes?”

“For example, 'the entire story flow feels a little unnatural', or 'a certain scene is too long', or 'the story development needs to be changed completely', or something...”

Once there are parts that require drastic changes, the situation gets really tiring. It's not as bad as being unable to use it, but the editing part really is important.

Okay, leaving aside the 1st volume where I needed 3 revisions, there was one time in my experience when I needed a drastic change in the 3rd volume.

The editor-in-charge pointed out that the final battle was too long.

The battle against Pluto in the first volume was really long, and I thought I did good for that, so I got cocky and said that I wanted to get a high, but the results weren't as good.

The editor-in-charge pointed out that the battle part was too long, so I made heavy cuts on the battle scenes in the 3rd volume.

It's like a woman who had a breakup, and had a haircut. I'm not a woman though, and I never had a breakup.

"Eh! Then, did your first love succeed?"

The moment I mentioned the haircut example, Nitadori responded very enthusiastically. Really I found her to be girlish given how interested she was in regards to 'love topics'.

"So, sensei...how's your girlfriend like?"

I knew this Nitadori was asking a rhetorical question.

"I have yet to receive a confession from anyone till this point..."

"Why the formal language?"

"Why exactly...?"

I guess a person with neither friends nor girlfriend is probably an alien.

And I'm not an alien. Inductive reasoning complete.

Back on point,

I revert the topic back to the cutting of the manuscript.

Because of this, I cut a lot of parts from the original fight scene.

And the number of enemies that originally appeared in battle was reduced in half. A few would have appeared in other scenes, but even though there were some named characters, I scrapped them.

Looking at the results however, I felt this correction was really appropriate.

The battle description was simple, short, and compact, and I could add on the relaxing scenes later. Those scenes would become plot points later on.

"When there's no need for drastic changes, the editor-in-charge will typically say 'I'll explain it from the beginning'. In other words, he'll list all the issues from the beginning, in chronological order. He'll then specify the problem, like maybe the story structure's shoddy, the meaning hard to convey, or basic mistakes like typing errors or wrong kanji."

"At this moment, will you be looking at the printed manuscript?"

"That was how it went at first. The editor-in-charge will use the printer in the branch to print two copies, one of them for me. He'll also mark out the issues in red pen, which I call 'red marks'. After that, I'll follow the red marks and edit the manuscript on the computer."

"I see. But you just said 'that was how it went at first', right? What about now?"

Nitadori asked the obvious question.

And I answered,

"I'll bring my laptop to the meeting."

At the end of the year when I made my debut as an author, I received the publication fees for the 2nd volume that was released that October.

About money, I'll leave that for later (if I'm asked)—

Anyway, I used that money to buy a little laptop.

It's thin and small, not troublesome even if I put it in a bag and bring it around. Also, I actually bought a brand new model, and managed to pay it off in one go.

And using this laptop, I could work on my way to and fro, or in the hotel. This really helped me out.

The large laptop I first bought was old, but it wasn't faulty, so even after 4 years, I'll continue to use it. When connecting to the internet at home, I'll use the large one. If I have to be picky about it, the operating speed's a little slow, but this won't cause me any problems.

It's very helpful to have 2 computers for work. In case one breaks down, I can continue to work.

I once read in a certain book that professionals always have a spare just in case, but the one stating it in the book was a cameraman.

I'll typically bring that laptop, which I bought with my own money, to meetings.

At first, I would edit the red marks that night in the hotel in a handwritten manner, but,

"Actually...my handwriting...not nice at all..."

“Eh? —Really!”

“Yes...that's right.”

I never thought Nitadori would be that surprised.

I suppose she never did see my handwriting; no, actually, I did write something on the blackboard during class. Back then, I did my best trying to write.”

“Erm...and then?”

“Hm, there are times when I can't read my own handwriting...”

“...”

This really isn't something to be proud of.

But I really couldn't do anything about it.

At first, after having my meeting with the editor-in-charge, I'll write words on the script in red pen. My handwriting's so atrocious however that there are times when I don't know what I'm writing.

When writing, I still remember the points he pointed out. If I think of how to edit it, I'll record it down.

But there's naturally a lot of parts I need to edit.

After 3 hours, I couldn't remember the parts the editor-in-charge asked me to edit.

And in that situation, there are times when I'm troubled because I can't read my own red words.

“Ahh! What did he say is the problem here!”

And such situations just kept increasing (at this moment, I'm left at my wits' end and have to call the editor-in-charge.)

So I decided to bring a laptop to the meetings.

So in other words, at the conference table—

The editor-in-charge will have the printed manuscript, while I'll be looking at the laptop screen.

Of course, I wouldn't forget to first add a '222' at the back of the file name.

Once he points out the errors, I'll immediately move the mouse. If it's skipping lots of pages, I'll use the search function to move to that page.

And when he mentions the issue,

I'll edit it immediately if it can be done easily. A mistype or a wrong word can be classified as such.

The advantage of this is that the editor-in-charge can make the corrections immediately.

If the issue requires a longer time to explain, I'll leave a few spaces and add what's the need, like, "I need more lines here."

"I need to cut a lot here."

"I need to make this scene match the last one"

Or things like that.

"As for the time required to edit the manuscript...if there's a need to edit a lot of it, it'll take about a week. If there's ample time until the next deadline, I can spend a few more days. I'll then complete the second manuscript and send it to the editor-in-charge again."

"And the editor-in-charge will check through it again?"

"Yeah. He'll check if the parts are edited, and find mistakes. Of course, there'll be far fewer mistakes in the second one than in the first one—or I'll cry."

"Haha."

"If there's no need for me to head down to the editorial branch again, the second and third draft review will be done through the phone. When calling through the phone, I'll put my cellphone in hands-free mode and put it in front of my laptop, holding my meeting this way. He'll call me, and since it'll typically be a long talk, 30 minutes will be considered quite short. There was once when we talked for 2 hours."

"I see...there's something I'll like to ask first."

"Go ahead."

"When the editor-in-charge tells you 'this part needs correction', do you feel hurt about it? This novel conveys all your ideas, right? Even if it's a small part, you won't feel angry or hurt to hear 'please edit this part' will you?"

"No, practically not."

I simply replied.

As a professional author.

In other words, since a publisher's willing to publish my books, and I can obtain a publishing fee
—

The work I write has to be checked by the editor-in-charge.

If I think I'm completely rejected because my work's denied, and I sink into depression,
I can't be a professional author.

A long time before I became an author, probably 5th grade, I once saw a prose with such content.

I don't know who the author was, probably a bestselling author.

Back then, I only thought 'I see'. When I had the potential to be a professional author myself however, I suddenly thought of it, and I couldn't forget about it.

Of course, if I encountered a situation I can't back down on no matter what, I'll insist until the very end.

To insist until the very end...in fact, such a situation's very rare.

When our opinions clash, I'll typically back down and edit the parts.

I've been doing that till this point, and the books were a hit, so I felt I should simply do that.

After emphasizing this part clearly, I added on,

"I haven't ended up in a situation where the story doesn't get picked up at all...maybe I'll be really sad if I do end up encountering that. At the end-of-year party, I think a senior writer I met said 'if your work doesn't get picked up many times, it'll get really depressing'."

I can only imagine it in reality, but that definitely hurts.

"That's...tough."

Nitadori probably felt the same too as she lamented.

"Now then, I'll get to the part 'how many versions must I do'."

"Okay."

"Typically, I'll finalize things at the 3rd manuscript."

"Finalize, as in?"

"It simply means completing the manuscript. I'll think of it as 'sending the completed, edited manuscript out' though. That part basically means the job is done. The deadline will typically mean that the story's to be finalized on a certain month, certain day."

"I see. So that means you're done with your best."

"Yeah, but even though the writing's done, I still have a lot of things to do before the novel gets published."

I've explained things to the 'finalized' part, but an author's work doesn't end here. It's easier than writing, but there's a lot of things to do.

I look at the watch, and find that we'll reach the destination in an hour. I leave the seat again, washed my hands in the toilet, and returned to my seat.

I've taken this trip several times, and it'll take about 3 hours from the station nearest to my house to the terminal. Back then, I would read books, listen to music, space out, record down the ideas I thought of, or work on my laptop.

I never thought that I would be seated side by side with my female classmate (though she's a year younger), chatting non stop.

And she's a voice actress, to boot.

And she's actually acting in the anime adaptation of my novel.

"Kept you waiting!"

"I waited for you! Now then, please go through the process after the finalization!"

"I'll feel very relaxed after the finalization's done, freedom, a sense of liberty, like 'Great! It's over!' Some authors will say stuff like 'feels like I just broke out from hell'. Well, but my thinking's more like 'okay, time to write the next work'."

"...Eh? You aren't going out to play?"

"Right now, I feel that I'm enjoying myself writing. When I first finalized my script, I had a sense of accomplishment over having finished something, so I think such a feeling will prompt me to work on the next story."

"A-a workaholic? Are you a workaholic, sensei?"

"I guess...but as I said before, the work doesn't end here.

Now then, what'll happen to the manuscript after it's finalized?

After the editor-in-charge does the final checks, there's a need to do a cross check.

The manuscript will be printed in the exact layout as the print book, and they are then handed to the reviewers.

"Reviewers...what are they?"

Nitadori asked. It's not commonly heard, so I guess it's not strange for her not to know.

"Reviewers means that they check whether there's a mistake in the work. That's what they do."

"Oo..."

"There's also the term proofreaders. Have you heard of it?"

"I think I heard of it. Is there a difference?"

"I got curious once and checked on it. There's actually a major difference between them. Simply put, proofreaders check that the original manuscript is the same as the printed work."

"Eh? What about reviewers? Is there another work?"

"Reviewers check if there are mistakes in the Japanese, whether the plot is logical, whether there are factual inaccuracies, all kinds of checks, actually."

"What are factual inaccuracies...any examples?"

"For example—"

I spent three seconds thinking of a good example, and said,

"Assuming that I have a line in the text 'I'm head to the capitol of USA, New York City.'"

"So the reviewer will point it out to you, saying, 'the capitol's actually Washington D.C.. You made a mistake'. Right?"

"That's right. But...this line may be correct."

"Yeah. It'll be correct, if it had just gained independence, that is."

Nitadori answered without thinking, and I was really surprised by it.

I read through many books, and accumulated lots of useless trivia, but I never expected Nitadori to actually give the correct answer immediately.

"Correct...back then, the capitol was New York City. If the story's set in that era, it's correct not to edit it in that situation. The reviewers have to be particular about that. Of course, if there's a mistake in the information the author found, and wrote it as 'Capitol, Philadelphia', the reviewer too has to say 'looking at the year and date, the capitol's still in New York City' and point out the error."

"Wow. This job's tough—I see. So that's why the original manuscript has to be handed for a professional check."

"That's the case. On a side note, the term required is review, but some authors can understand if you use the term proofread."

When I debuted, I too didn't know the difference between review and proofread, and of course, I couldn't differentiate between the two.

In the following explanation, there'll be certain professional terms. For experienced authors and editors, those might be common terminologies, but they might be foreign to most ordinary people. In other words, most people who just became authors won't be familiar with those terms.

"Erm...what does that mean?"

A rookie will keep asking the editor-in-charge this question as they create their own work.

I too couldn't explain what I was doing when I was doing the first 4 volumes or so. The editor-in-charge was just telling me 'edit it like this. Then this.' and I would follow.

"Erm, there'll be some professional terms used later on..."

I prefaced with those words, and explained,

"The book and the manuscript printouts are both called 'Galley proof', or simply 'gally'. More people will use the term 'galley', and I've been using the same term too."

"Galley...what does that mean?"

"Well, I too was curious as to why it's called 'galley', so I did my research through the internet."

"The internet's really convenient. And so?"

"After that, I found that the term originated from a Galley ship. It's an old type of ship, with many oars on the flanks, and the slaves or soldiers will keep rowing. That's called a Galley."

"Galley, is it? Such a term can refer to a kitchen on a boat or a plane."

"You really know your stuff, Nitadori."

“Eh? I’m glad that you’re praising me, but there’s no benefit of that, you know?”

“I’m just stating my honest thoughts. Not really praising you there, actually?”

“Besides, I got lots of things I don’t know of. Not as impressive as the internet, at least.”

“You’re being humble again.”

“Okay, keep on talking.”

“Okay, continuing on, why is a galley ship involved with printing—”

Back then, when talking about printing, it’ll refer to the movable type printing.

“What’s that?”

“Eh? That’s...”

She’s not acting humble now, is she?

Movable type printing refers to the use of metal word molds, line them up, and then use that to print. It’s a lot easier than to ‘copy’ or ‘woodblock printing’, where the printing can’t work if a part of the mold can’t be used.

This was one of the three great inventions that prompted the European Renaissance (the other two being the compass and gunpowder). Humans were able to provide books for more people using such a cheap, quick manner.

“I see...”

“You never attended history class in middle school?”

“Well...I guess I probably fell asleep back then? Anyway, please continue with the Galley ships.”

A single word required movable type blocks, so there’s a need for many of these to print out an entire page. Once the words are chosen, people will put the words on the platter. That platter has something to do with the ship, so people call the ship Galley.

I don’t know who said it, but someone from somewhere once said,

“It’s really crammed and packed inside, like the oars of an old Galley ship haha.”

Anyway, that’s what happened.

The term galley ended up being a term used to check if there is an error printing the words.

And people began to call it galley proofing, a review of the manuscript.

Galley printing soon became used for reviewing script, and then it became a 'reviewed manuscript'.

In this example, people in modern society no longer use printing techniques, and they're all printed from a computer, but the term used in the past still lives on.

"Eh...I learned something."

"Well, that doesn't really involve an author's work actually..."

"I know what's reviewing now. Will this come out in the test, sensei?"

We're off-topic, so back to the point.

"Erm, which part did I explain to...?"

"To the part where your manuscript becomes a basis for comparison, and handed to the reviewer'."

"I see, thanks."

"Don't mind."

Once the review script's printed, it'll be handed to the reviewers.

This action is called 'first check'. It's the first check (or review), so that's the term.

The next one's called the 'second check'.

The first and second checks refer to the actions,

But sometimes, it can also refer to the review script, so it gets a little complicated.

From here on, I wouldn't omit the 'script' part when talking about it.

So when the reviewers print the first review script and do all kinds of checks—

I'll receive a 'duplicate'. To be precise, it's a duplicate copy.

Anyway, it's the exact same printed copy as the one sent to the reviewers.

As the author, I'll have to reread this manuscript and check through it.

This action's called the 'author's corrections', or simply put 'author's review'.

Basically, at this step, I just need to 'check for missing, or incorrect words, check if there's anything else wrong.'

"But then, the more I look at the paragraphs or text, the more I'll take note about them. I've reread it many times when writing, but I'll keep finding parts where the text, or pacing is worse off."

"What will you do in such situations?"

"I'll try to correct it as best as I can."

It's a printed story, so I need to mark out the parts that need correction in red pen, and note down how I'm supposed to go about doing it.

On a side note, correcting the manuscript with a red pen is also called 'red correction'.

When editing the manuscript, the editor-in-charge will use what's called a 'correction symbol'.

These are symbols designed to accurately convey how to correct the text. For example, if there's a need to swap the top and bottom lines, he'll use a reverse S shape symbol. The top lines will be on the top of the lines, and the bottom line at the bottom.

I didn't know that at all, so I wrote down a rather complicated, unique method of correction.

And the editor-in-charge kept asking me.

"So, what does this mean?"

Leaving aside the correction symbols,

If I'm holding a first review duplicate copy, and I want to make major changes to it no matter what,

And my biggest thought is "I want to rewrite this page!"

"Can you do that?"

Nitadori asked.

The answer is yes, I can.

"It's actually not that impressive...there's a method called 'swapping entire pages'."

As the term implies, I'll rewrite what I want to rewrite, and send an email saying 'please use this for page 000). Sometimes, I'll end up swapping out many pages.

"But...I do think it's best to avoid major changes like 'swapping pages'."

That's because that if I'm to make full page changes at this phase, the page will end up not passing the first review.

I thought the act that if time allows, I hope to improve the manuscript.

But if I don't tell myself,

"That's enough. It's complete."

From time to time, I'll end up correcting it over and over again.

It's ideal to finish the work at the finalized part.

"Though I think this way..."

"But life isn't that easy, huh?"

"Now then—once the reviewers finish the first review, the review copy will be returned back to the editorial branch. Thus, I'll finish the author's review before the deadline."

I divert my topic back to the process.

"I have to do two things. First is to hand the manuscripts with my red marks to the editor-in-charge, and second, to check through the first review the reviewers did."

Nitadori titled her head, asking,

"Hm? I get the first one...but why the second?"

When reviewers find out an extremely obvious error during the checks—

For example, like 'there's no period at the end of the paragraph', 'the furigana's completely wrong', they'll correct it with red pen.

But there are times when the reviewers end up 'unable to tell if it's wrong', and they'll mark the questionable parts with pencil.

Basically, only the authors can edit the text.

The editor-in-charge and reviewers won't make changes at will.

I have to be in charge of the red marks, and also answer all the issues marked in pencil.

"Then, what kind of issues will the reviewers point out?"

"All kinds of them—"

In fact, every reviewer has their own style of pointing out issues, and the frequency of them.

The reviewers of Dengeki Bunko are basically outsourced, so I can't tell if they're all done by the same people.

I don't know the reviewers names, and I don't know what kind of people they are.

But if I have to say something—

Thank you for everything you did.

"The most common issue here is probably the difference between the words displayed, and the furigana. In other words 'mismatched terms'."

"Mismatched terms...for example?"

"At a certain point, the term 'produced' can be read in three different ways, and the terms used may be different elsewhere, or the katakana for bodyguard isn't consistent. In katakana terms, some add the black 'middle dot', and some don't."¹¹

"I see."

"Also, there are often cases of people pointing out the strange use of 'Teniwoha'."

"Teniwoha?"

"That's...basically the usage of particles."

"Women? Girls?"¹²

"No, how am I supposed to use girls?"

"Erm...for bad things?"

"I'll get arrested by the police, so don't say it. The particle here refers to the Japanese particles used to help convey the meaning."

"Ah, ahh...I know that."

"You should be knowing that, right?"

"I-I guess? So in other words, the use of particles is called 'Teniwoha', and some people will point your mistakes in them, right?"

¹¹ Bodyguard can be read as 'ボディーガード' or 'ボディガード'. Just a lengthened middle for the first. Produced can be read as '生みだす', '生みだす' or '産み出す'. All three are read as Umidasu

¹² 助詞 and 女子 have the same pronunciation, Joshi, ジョシ

"Right. When I'm too engrossed, the particles gets weird, like I can't differentiate between the use of 'ga' and 'ha', and that's still okay. Sometimes, there are lines that don't look Japanese at all...most of the problems will be pointed out by the editor-in-charge, and the missed parts will be corrected by the reviewers."

"I see. Anything else?"

"Anything else...like a basic, stupid mistake...it's embarrassing talking about it...but I did mess up on the characters back then."

Even I didn't know why I would be making such mistakes.

When writing the 5th volume of Vice Versa, I kept mistaking the names of two characters, and it lasted for 20 pages.

The bearded old man's using female pronouns, and the beautiful lady's saying things like

"I'd say that I don't understand."

Once the editor-in-charge pointed it out, my face paled. I really wonder what'll happen if the book's published like that...

"Also, I did make such mistakes before...8 people fall into a hole. 3 died. How many people escaped?"

"If we're not considering that Shin died, 5."

"Yeah, this is elementary math. In the original manuscript however, it ended up as 4..."

"Wow..."

"It's fine for you to laugh out loud, you know?"

"No need for that. Anyone can make mistakes."

"Thanks. Sigh, I got such mistakes pointed out several times. Also, when 'the author does the author check', I'll definitely use a pencil or a mechanical pencil."

"Why?"

"Because the editor-in-charge will be making corrections in red pen at the top, indicating 'this problem appeared before, and I corrected it'. I heard that this stuff will be kept."

"Eh!?"

“So I typically use a multipen with red and black ballpoint inks and a mechanical pencil function. I keep it with me at all times.”

“Ohh! You brought it along today too? What does it look like?”

“Wait.”

I stood up to show her the real thing, turned my body around, and reached for the rack.

There's a pen pouch attached outside the bag, and I had two of them stuffed in there; one of them's a spare. I took a pen, sat down, and handed it to Nitadori.

“Oh, so this is your good partner, sensei? Looks classy!”

Nitadori marveled in an ostentatious tone. Actually, this is cheap stuff, nothing too fancy. I guess they do sell them in convenience stores too.

“So in the future, when your memorium is built, this pen will be used for display, right?”

No, that's not the case.

Speaking of which, I never thought about building a memorium or something. If someone has that much money, please use it for aid relief.

I stick that pen into the chest pocket, and continue explaining,

“I'll hold my mechanical pencil and check through the first review that went through checking. Sometimes, I'll add some stickies if there are problems, but I'll typically flip through the entire manuscript page by page.”

And then, assuming that I can see the parts from the reviewers,

and if I agree to them, and hope to make such changes in the text,

I'll use the mechanical pencil to mark the part with a large circle, writing 'please do this'.

In contrast, if I feel there's no need to correct it,

I'll mark it with a cross.

Sometimes, I'll write down 'please leave it as this'

“Please leave it as this?”

“It has nothing to do with mothers.”¹³

“Ah, I see.”

13 Text has it as Mama de. You know what Mama is.

I'm really grateful to the corrections by the reviewers, but there are a lot of parts I wish to maintain. Looking at my situation, there are some moments where I'll leave strange Japanese in the conversations, so I'll mark all those suggestions with crosses.

And so, I continue to flip through about 150 pages per volume, (around 300 pages per book), checking through them.

Sometimes, there are moments where even I can't decide.

For example, the reviewer points out a kanji similar in meaning, but I don't know which one's appropriate.

In that situation, I won't make a decision for the time being, place a sticky there, and first crumple up the edges of the review manuscript.

Once all the checks are done, "About this—" I'll ask the editor-in-charge, and leave it to him to decide.

And at this point, I remember there's something I forgot to mention.

"Ah, about the location where the first review check is done—"

"It's not at the editorial branch?"

"Hm, it's basically there the prior year. I typically head to Tokyo for meetings, so I'll make time to do the author checks. During 10th grade however, I couldn't head to Tokyo because of this work, so I could only do this through mail. Once the first checks are done and sent to me, I'll send it back along with the author checks."

"I see."

"And if there are parts the editor-in-charge can't get, he'll give me a call, and I'll tell him directly on the phone. Over there, the first review will be done, and another step before publication is completed."

"But there's still a need for another review, right?"

"Yeah, there's still a second review."

In the second review, I'll have to repeat the process.

Once the parts pointed out by the first review are edited, it'll become the second review.

The reviewers get the second review, and I'll get the duplicate.

In the second duplicate, I'll have to check if the edited parts are completely okay. This will be called the second author check.

And to check the second review manuscript the reviewers checked, as an author, I'll head to the editorial branch (or contact through mail again).

In the second check, there's a high chance of new issues pointed out. This includes the parts missed the first time, parts I chose to maintain from the first review, and so on.

I'll again use the mechanical pencil to mark circles or crosses.

"The two review jobs all collectively called Galley checks."

"Hearing you say that, it sounds really troublesome."

"In fact, it is." I grumbled.

"I had to widen my eyes and look for mistakes. It's very tiring."

"I know."

"But...such work's unavoidable if I want to publish a book without errors."

"I see. Good work."

"Th-thanks..."

"Is it finally over?"

"No, there's still something the author has to do."

"There's still more? Erm, what is it?"

"What's left for the author is to write the afterword, put a recent photo of the author, write an author introduction, and check the illustrations."

Writing the afterword.

The afterword's basically a necessity in any light novel. It's imperative to write it.

In terms of content, typically, it's about 2 to 4 pages. Some have it at 1.

Basically, the author's free to write whatever he wants in the afterword, anything as long as it doesn't taunt society or the masses.

In this world, there are authors who get the stage to show off their talents, and they'll work hard on writing it—

But to be honest, I'm bad at writing afterword.

At first, I was still decent. I debuted, and was grateful to everyone, really grateful.

With that emotion, I wrote out all my emotions, spending 2 pages of it.

After that, I ended up not knowing what I should write.

Even if I wanted to write about myself like other authors, I couldn't be saying that I'm a high school kid, or that I'm taking a break from school.

To be honest, I really found it difficult writing afterword, "This isn't good! That isn't good!" always groaning and writing. If I'm past 20, and there's a bill passed stating 'afterword are forbidden', I might give it a vote.

"I see...I never thought it would be that difficult..."

"It's so difficult it's annoying. It's said that an essay allows room to showcase an author's personality, so I'm rather curious as to how the readers will view it..."

"Looking at it, I'll guess you're a college student..."

"That's not too bad, I guess. On a side note, the 10th volume's to be published at the same time the anime's air—the afterword for that volume contains thanksgiving to all those involved in the anime production."

"So when's the deadline for the afterword?"

"Actually, the ideal is that it's sent to the publisher along with the finalized manuscript, and that it can be checked together...if I can't make it, I'll send it during the first review, and at latest, the second review."

"I see."

"I did hear from senior authors that there's another way to submit it later, after the second review."

"I can't imagine it...how?"

"First off, leave a few spaces for the parts meant for the afterword. It's said that the afterword finished later won't be deemed an essay, but an illustration, a picture, and it'll be inserted. Those authors that want to change, play with the playout and add some flavor will use this method."

"So...in other words, it's fine even if you're either using pictures or written manuscript?"

"Sorta, I guess...?"

"Then, how?"

“How? As in?”

“Don't you want to try writing your afterword handwritten?”

“Erm...nobody will be able to decipher it, you know?”

Once the afterword's done, there's a need for the author's recent photo and introduction.

For Dengeki Bunko, such content will be contained at the flap under the cover (reverse side).

The author photo is to follow a 30 x 32 format, and any photo or illustration can be put there.

Actually, the author's actual photo should be there, as it's called the author's recent photo.

But in Dengeki Bunko, or rather, in the world of light novels—

Few authors will actually put their own photos, for obvious reasons.

There are all kinds of patterns, and most of them are basically photos of pet, things, or illustrations.

For illustrations, some might get the novel illustrator to do one for the author, or that the author may ask an acquaintance to chip in.

There are those who have artistic ability, and draw their own illustration.

“But sensei, aren't you using a photo of a 'keyboard'?”

“Yeah.”

In the author's recent photo from the 1st to 9th volume, I've been using the photo of the keyboard I first bought. Some authors will do the same thing, so I think this is rather overdone.

These photos were taken from the smart phone I bought back then, and the photo for the 1st to 3rd volumes are all the same. After that, I wanted to make some changes, so starting from the 4th volume, there were some minor changes every time. Even so, the keyboard's the only thing I took photos of.

Nitadori then reached her hand into her handbag.

“Wait here.”

She took out a light novel.

And once she did, I could tell what it was. Unmistakably, it's the first volume of 'Vice Versa'.

I could see many little stickies inside the book. Nitadori probably read through it thoroughly for the After Record, and it's really delightful.

She looked at the first volume's photo, and stared at me, saying,

"To be honest, you don't look alike."

Of course.

I answered.

"I'm older now."

It's really delightful to humor someone.

And publishing a book that moved a reader will certainly elevate this happiness.

Placing the first volume on her thighs, Nitadori asked,

"Leaving aside whether it's the author closeup or not, what about the introduction at the bottom?"

"That too is for the author to do whatever he wants."

Dengeki Bunko's column is to have the large author name right below the closeup, and below that one's the author introduction.

This part uses the horizontal format, and (typically) ends in 5 lines, 24 letters per line.

It's an author's introduction, and I'm supposed to write some age (or year I was born in), a brief summary, and so on—

Amongst the works in Dengeki Bunko, this column is where authors get to do whatever they want.

Most authors will report on recent events over here, so the content will change in every volume.

"It's really tough having to write this...why do I have to change the content for every volume...no, it's not that there's a need to change, but everyone just seem to do this..."

And I ended up in full grumbling mode.

I really don't want anyone else seeing this 'author complaining to a girl younger than he is'.

"Tough, isn't it? Okay, okay."

Argh, now she's actually comforting me. This is embarrassing. Good thing she didn't pat my head.

"But I have to keep my personal particulars a secret. There's nothing recent I can report on."

"You're right."

The forest outside really is filled with autumn, or,
I really love snow, because the world becomes peaceful, or,
The cherry blossoms have bloomed. I really want some dango, or,
I'll write these thoughts based on the seasons, but I'm running out of ideas.

"And so I thought, I might as well wing it."

"Wing what?"

"The 3rd child's born, and it's a girl'. Or, 'it's been a week since I moved to Germany. The beer's nice'. Or stuff like that."

"HAHAHA!"

I guess I struck a laughter chord in her, as she's laughing out loud.

"Sensei, sensei. What about this? A girl younger than me caught my secret, and is blackmailing me."

"Alright, using that for the 10th volume."

"HAHAHAHA!"

After laughing for quite a while, Nitadori then said,

"The next part...is to check on the illustrations."

"This part isn't that difficult, or rather, I'll say it's a delight."

The illustrator did his best to draw pictures for me.

No matter whether it's CG or hand-made, the editor-in-charge will send it to me in a compressed folder, or get me a download link.

In terms of order, the illustrator will first finish the colored cover illustration, since it can't be published without a cover. Next, the opening color illustrations, followed by the black and white illustrations in the text.

After checking through the illustrations, I'll immediately approve it if there aren't any mistakes.

"Are there situations where it's NG?"

"Yes. Just a little."

The rare situation refers to,

Mistakes on the specific character in the color illustration.

Where the position of the name tag is incorrect.

Where the text has it as right side, but it appears as left side on the text.

It's this kind of mistakes.

I get to enjoy the illustrations earlier than others, so I'm always looking forward to it.

"Wait, sensei! You say it like it's nothing, but if that's a mistake, isn't that serious? If the right and left side are reversed..."

"It's not that bad."

"Wh-what do you intend to do? What did you do back then?"

"Change the text."

"Ehhh?"

"I didn't explain this part before. After sending out the second manuscript, I'll print out a 'white copy' to compare it to the manuscript. The illustrations will be done before the electronic preview's done, so I can fix the parts where the sides are reversed."

"...Really can't imagine that. But if you can't fix it in any way, what will you do?"

"In that situation, I'll let it slip. It's common for illustrations to differ from the text in novels."

"Really?"

"Really."

"The illustration check's done...I guess this should be over."

I said a lot on this day.

I've been explaining for more than 2 and a half hours.

The train entered the city, headed straight down the straight. Many have got off the train midway through, and the carriage's empty now.

The woman, whom Nitadori cast the spell on, managed to successfully get off the train through the anti-magic installation called the 'cellphone alarm'.

"Thanks for today...no, it's interesting today too."

She said as she placed the first volume into her bag, nodded to thank me. She'll hit me if she nodded towards me, so she nodded forward.

"No need, no need."

I too nodded forward towards the seat in front of me.

But even so, there's still another 20 minutes until we reach the terminal.

I'm finding it unbearable not talking out of a sudden.

I can't do idle chat, let alone be bad at it.

And so, I said,

"Well, I guess you'll have to wait till next week for the more complicated questions. I still have time to answer some simple stuff, so is there anything?"

"Really? Then, I want to ask something that's unrelated to today!"

"What is it?"

"Do you receive a lot of fan letters?"

"I do receive a few, but I'm not sure if that's a lot."

I state my honest thoughts.

What can be considered more? I never discussed this with other authors, so I don't know.

But I'll accept most of them gratefully.

"Then, what do you think."

"Hm...I got more female fan letters."

It's said that the main demographic for light novels is men. Leaving aside books targeted at women, that is definitely the case for Dengeki Bunko.

But even so, there are works that are very popular with girls.

Based on the fan letters, the readers for 'Vice Versa' is basically 50:50 between male and female.

I originally wrote what I wanted to see, so I never actually wrote anything that would pander to either side.

But I typically won't write erotic scenes that are obviously targeted at boys, and this obviously doesn't have anything to do with me being unable to do it.

As for why it's popular with females, I suppose it's due to the two protagonists, Shin and Sin.

"This party story's brimming with passion!"

Another editor-in-charge, not mine, used to say that to me.

Leaving that aside, I analyzed,

“I guess it's because, girls really aren't bashful writing letters to me?”

“Then, what's written on the letters...?”

Nitadori asked courteously, but I still can't answer it honestly.

I do think that letters are something the recipient should personally receive, and only the sender and I can know of its contents.

But even if I do say so, in fact...others would have already read the fan letters.

Because the editorial branch will check through them.

At the end of the pocket book, there'll be a line 'you're welcome to provide your valuable feedback and thoughts on this book'. The readers will then see the official homepage, and the lines 'please click on the 'reader questionnaire'.

Right below it are the columns 'Please send the letter to', which is the editorial branch location. As for the 'for OOOO', there's a need to fill in either 'my name', or the 'illustrator's'.

The readers will send letters to the editorial branch, so the editors will first check through.

And so, by the time the letters reach me, the letters are all open.

Why, you ask?

The editors are to check if there's anything dangerous inside, but the main aim is to remove any letters that'll obviously demotivate the author or the illustrator.

There are all kinds of people in the world, so I guess this is something that had to be done.

While wondering how I'm supposed to answer Nitadori's question—

I ended up with the conclusion that, 'I can only tell her'.

“I won't tell anyone about the content of the letter. It's a secret between the sender and me.”

“Is that so? I see. Sorry.”

Nitadori easily gave me leeway.

To be honest, it's great that she's saying this. After heaving a sigh of relief, I guess it's fine for me to talk about some trivial stuff.

"But the readers are sending me letters, so the contents are basically cheering me on. As an author, I really feel gracious and delighted. Before I read each letter, I'll put my palms together, and then I'll open it."

It's true. I treat every single letter as a small household altar.

"I suppose the senders are happy that you're doing that."

Nitadori giggled. She's not looking down on me, but actually delighted for me.

There are fan letters that left quite an impression of me within these two years.

And there were two of these that shocked me so much, I'll never forget about them. (Of course, I can't tell Nitadori this)

The first letter's the one I received soon after I took leave from school, last April.

However, I didn't know if I could call this a fan letter.

"Actually, I'm wondering if I should be sending this letter to you...looking at your personality however, I suppose you'll like this one."

The editor-in-charge said this to me, and handed me the letter in the editorial branch.

Feeling tentative, I was wondering 'what kind of letter is it' as I kept reading, and I found it to be rather shocking.

There were several pieces of paper in it. The words are very neat and pretty, and it started off,

"Hello for the first time. I am Shin. I don't know how you knew that I was in Reputation when I was young...I'm shocked."

In other words, that's a letter from Shin.

And then, there's a lot of these stuff continued on.

At first, he said about how shocked he was when he first read 'Vice Versa'—

And then he said that he's very old now, but he really did miss the times back then—

Many of his classmates had already departed for the afterlife—

Till this day, he would continue to talk on the phone with Shin, who conquered the entire Reputation.

That he understood very well some parts were different from his memories, because the author respected the privacy of him and his friends, and he really thanked them earnestly, and so on—

Anyway, this letter's pretty interesting from top to bottom.

The sender's a 74 year old male from Hokkaido.

Till now, I don't know if that man actually wrote that letter for real, or was he writing such a massive prank to make the author laugh.

But I guess the letter's so interesting it doesn't matter, and I read it again a few times.

Till this day, I'm wondering if he'll send a 'continuation', but it never came.

"Now that I'm advanced in age, I can see the end of my life. I'm going to head to Reputation and live an immortal life there.'

Based on what was written there, I supposed he's already over there.

The other letter,

Was rather grim in content.

This letter was earlier than the one aforementioned.

It was during October, 2 years ago, 2 months after I debuted.

Back then, I received some fan letters about the first volume. I was delighted, and read through it a few times.

A certain day, the editor-in-charge contacted me.

"I sent a few fan letters to you, and one of them has a sticky on it; it's fine for you not to read if if you're scared of being uncomfortable. I do think you'll be happy to read it until the very end however, so I'm sending it to you."

That was what he informed me on the phone.

Soon after, I received those fan letters.

One of them had a sticky attached to them.

First off,

I was surprised that it was a letter sent through air mail.

The sender's in a foreign country, and the name's completely Western.

There's a katakana name attached to the letter, and I learned that the sender's a woman called 'Stella Hamilton'.

The letter's completely in Japanese, and I was completely stunned. It's not as nice as the real Mr Shin afterwards, but her words are rather pretty.

The content.

Really was grim.

I feel, that amongst all the fan letters I received, this one's the heaviest.

In the letter, this girl called Stella's studying in 11th grade.

And she got bullied at school.

Her appearance naturally attracted the attention of many, and she was bullied since Elementary school.

She did live in Japan before because of her parents' work. In Japan, she was bullied for 'being a foreigner'. Even though she currently resides in her parents' native country, she still remained bullied.

Her parents never thought that this daughter of theirs would end up like this, and she did not dare discuss this with her parents, so she was anguished within.

She had several instances of wanting to commit suicide.

She wondered, since life was so full of pain, what's the point of continuing to live.

That was the content of the letter.

Having read this, I felt my gut sink.

"Why's such a person sending such a letter to me?"

I was skeptical.

Back then, I was still in my first year of high school. I wanted to say 'what hopes does she have for a 16 year old boy wearing a school uniform?' At the same time however, I thought 'ah, but this Miss Stella doesn't know about it', and so, I flipped the letter over.

And then, I found it to be a fan letter after all.

Starting from the 4th page, the text became lively, and it recorded the situation as to how she bought the first volume of 'Vice Versa', and her personal book review of it.

She came to Japan in the summer, and bought 'Vice Versa' and other mangas at an anime shop in Akihabara.

She really liked Japanese manga and anime, but it was the first time she tried reading light novels. It really was a coincidence that she would reach out for 'Vice Versa'.

And then, she really enjoyed herself. She was able to forget all the time and pain everyday.

She was really able to find some semblance of joy in her arduous life.

Thank goodness I didn't die. As long as I live, I'll be able to find happiness, so I'll continue to work hard from now on.

I'm really looking forward to your exciting works. I'll definitely buy it when there's any continuation. I'll ask for acquaintances in Japan to purchase this for me.

That was the content of the latter.

And added in the postscript was,

Shin and Sin are cool, but I prefer the strong, suave Pluto and the courageous Meek.

I hope that they'll be more active.

I'm a guy who won't cry even after reading a book or watching a movie, and till now, I've yet to cry.

But once I read this fan letter, I nearly broke into tears.

I was touched.

"After seeing your book, I'm glad that I've yet to die."

There's a foreign woman, older than me, actually saying such things to me

I once decided never to respond to any reader fan mail.

At first, I was wondering if I should reply to all the readers, or not at all, and I chose the latter.

2 months later, I broke the oath. I sent an illustration to this Stella Hamilton.

To promote sales, Dengeki Bunko will create postcards every month and put them in the shops for sale.

Back then, the 2nd volume was being sold, and luckily, 'Vice Versa' was nominated as one of the works with postcards made.

I received a sample from the editorial branch, and there's the cover illustration of the 2nd volume on it.

The cover back then was a scene of Shin in his school uniform and Sin in his battle armor, glaring at each other. There's two volumes of 'Vice Versa' then, but only these two appeared on the cover. In Dengeki Bunko, it's rare to see the covers with only male characters on them.

Well, it's to be expected that the cover isn't Pluto or Meek, but I did sign on that postcard. It's the signature the editor-in-charge asked me to practice, and this was the first time I did it in a non-practice situation, the first time for a reader.

To avoid making a mistake, I cautiously wrote down the name Miss Stella Hamilton in English, and checked it a few times.

I didn't know what to say at all, and there wasn't much space, so I just wrote the words 'thanks on it!'. I suppose these are the prettiest words I've ever written in my entire life.

It was the first time I actually sent a mail by air, but since the postcard wasn't returned to the sender address, the editorial branch, I suppose this Miss Stella Hamilton did receive it.

And then, she never sent me a letter again.

However, to me, this one reply to a fan letter was unforgettable to me.

At the very least, there's another letter in the 'fan letter security case'.

"Now then, can i ask you something? Have you responded to a fan letter till this day?"

I was thinking about those things, so when Nitadori suddenly asked me, I was taken aback.

"..."

I remained speechless, and after a while, I realized I had no need to tell the truth.

I only did reply to Miss Stella Hamilton.

But even the editorial branch didn't know about it.

I'm not good at lying,

And neither am I good at acting.

But,

"N-no, not at all."

I showcased my worst act at this moment.

Clearly, I looked like I was acting no matter how it seemed.

Nitadori seemed a little startled upon hearing this reply, and then, she beamed in delight,

"Really~? You never replied to anyone else? Like for example...a young girl?"

Is this girl an esper!? A magician!?

I do think this should be a coincidence, but my heart still raced with Nitadori stating that.

"No no no...not at all...? Because, I decided, not to reply to any letters. If there's any reply to the letters, I'll be very, very troubled, I guess."

I felt that the response I gave before was already so terrible, but this was worse. The records for the worst just kept getting broken.

But I could only pass this through with lies.

No matter how bad my acting was, Nitadori had no proof.



"Anyway, I guess I probably won't be sending any replies. It'll affect my work anyway."

Finally, I was able to speak Japanese. It sounded really haughty however. What kind of person do I think I am?

"Hm...I see."

Having finally stopped Nitadori's interrogation, I was soaked in cold sweat, leaning my entire body on the back rest, and I heaved a deep sigh.

I really couldn't act.

And I'll never act again.

I decided that if I have to act again,

I'll flee the scene immediately.

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

She—

Eri Nitadori continued to strangle my carotid pulses with her icy hands.

Her hands were really cold, and I could feel it from both sides of my head.

I laid on the ground, and she was sitting on me. The only thing appearing in my eyes was her upper body.

That would be the arms outstretched for my neck, her face, and the black hair reaching down the sides like curtains.

Her sobbing face was facing away from the light, and it looked a little dim, very tragic.

The tears, excessive as they piled within the inside of the glasses, continued to slowly fall and drip on my cheeks.

She slowly spoke up, probably to say something. After gasping, she said,

"W—"

It sounded really long.

"H—"

But it probably was very fast, in fact.

"Y—"

I guess It was extremely slow after all.

Why?

Why did it end up like this?

The final lights before death continued to flicker by my eyes.

To be continued...

Afterwords - Sigsawa Special V1

Hello everyone. This is the author Keiichi Sigsawa. Thank you for purchasing this new published work—

“I’m a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress I — Time to Play, First Half”.

The title of this book is so long a single line can’t contain it. Well, since it’s already so long, i should have crammed it all into two lines. Can I cram it into 2 lines instead? (Editorial branch note: Please start with the afterword already).

“I’m a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress I — Time to Play, First Half”. (This title is long, so I’ll simply shorten it to ‘this story’ from now on).

This is a new series I released after a long time.

Speaking of which, I’ve been an author for 14 years, but in terms of novels, I only managed to write two series that include ‘Kino’s Journey’ (and ‘Kino’s School’. No objections allowed), ‘Allison’ (including the sequels ‘Lillia and Treize’, ‘Meg and Seron’, ‘All the stories in the Story of A Large Continent series’. Even I was surprised by that. The first volume of ‘Allison’ was published in 2002, while the first volume of “I’m a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, (etc)” is actually a completely new series released 12 years later. It’s surprising that it’s been 12 years. An entire zodiac has already passed!

And thus, as per usual, it’s okay to read the ‘afterword’ of this volume as usual since it doesn’t reveal any plot. However, is it okay that the plot’s already revealed that much in the title...? Well, it can’t be helped.

Now then, it’s time for the afterword, so please allow me to be a little more passionate in discussing this story. Since I’m an author, I’m very familiar with this work.

The original idea of this story was formed about 4 years ago from now, in other words, from 2010. That was when I first came up with the plotline for this story, and it was March 30th.

Of course, I came up with the plot file because ‘I thought of it’, and it originated from a ‘dream’ (The dream here naturally refers to the one everyone sees when they sleep’.

There was a dream I had ever since I became an author.

How it felt to me was,

"I'm in a high school (or college) classmate, and I couldn't get along with my classmates as I haven't been to school for a long time, so I could only feel isolated and lonely. However (for some reason), as I'm an author,"

"It's fine. I'm an author after all!"

That was what I would always mutter to pass off my loneliness.

I suppose everyone can tell from this heartwarming, fleeting episode how distant I was from being a 'Winner in Life' during my student days, and there was nothing I could brag about myself until I became an author. I'm definitely not crying here.

However, it was only on this day (March 30th, 2010) that this dream was a little different. Nobody knew that I'm an author, but there's one female student who suddenly talked to me.

I forgot what were the exact lines, but she did say,

"I'm a voice actress, and I know your true identity!"

Once my jaw dropped (speechless) in shock, I opened my eyes.

I got up, and sent myself a message using the phone placed by my pillow.

"A story of a high school boy as an author having his secret known by his female classmate who works as a voice actress!"

Yes, that was the moment when the story was born.

Once I got to my work room, I immediately sat in front of the computer.

The file I created was titled 'A high schooler author (basic file)', and it was created at 12.36pm, 23 seconds, on March 30th, 2010 (well, the computer's clock will differ by a few minutes or so.).

Typically, I'll sleep till noon...so I really was just awake back then. Please do not imitate the lifestyle of a professional author. It may damage your body.

And then, using that dream as the basis, I continued to add on to the ideas I thought of. I revisited the diary that day. (I'll typically enter my diary entry into the computer every day), and I found out that I did have such a thing recorded. The following's what I copied from the entry:

It's a dream of me as a high school student, a distant dream of walking towards my high school.

I often had this dream, but it's different this time; there appeared a girl who works in the voice acting industry.

And so I thought of a story, and recorded it.

Also, I did leave this message on twitter. That was when I copied it too.

I quickly glossed over the idea of the dream I saw, and though I didn't know how to write, I thought it was interesting (or that was what I thought). Such occurrences were common, so I often had some sort of a recording device placed beside my pillow. Once I woke up, I would send a message to myself immediately.

If I had not seen the dream back then and recorded it down—

This story would not have happened. The majority of those who know the contents of the story and read the title would probably think,

“Hey, hey, Sigsawa! You just want to write your ‘dream’ as a story here, right?”

In fact, yes, the inspiration came from my dream! It's because this is based on my dream that I'm able to write such a dream-like story! If there's a category in wikipedia called ‘a work the author conceived in a dream’, please add this work to the category! Yes, I'll leave it to you!

For added precaution, I'll state beforehand that the basis of the protagonist isn't me. I couldn't write a single novel in high school. This protagonist's just my aspiration, a ‘dream-like’ setting. To be blatant, I'll say that the story itself is a fantasy, more fantastical than ‘Kino’s School’.

However, whenever i mention the profession of an author or Dengeki Bunko in this work, I'll use my various experiences.

“Eh! So a light novel author will collude secretly with the Dengeki Bunko editorial staff!”

I'll be very pleased if everyone's able to think this way after reading this story (Editorial branch: can't you please use another, amicable way of stating this?)

I have to clarify further that the basis of the heroine doesn't exist. I did search through the internet when deciding her name so as to avoid involving any actual voice actresses, and this is the reason why I chose this rare, unpronounceable name. If there's really a voice actor or actress

rookie with the same names, I do apologize deeply! Please allow me to use this chance to apologize to you! I'm sorry!

The story was actually written starting from August 2013. In other words, I had this idea brewing for more than 3 years,

The plot I first thought of back then is completely different from this one here! It's really completely different here.

I can't really remember when it was (I didn't record this down in a note), but the story just so happened to change. To avoid revealing the plot, I really can't say what sort of change happened in the story...and the story so happened to end up like this after I concocted this for so long.

Now then, as for why I actually started to write this story so suddenly—

I once had a premonition that light novels with protagonists being light novelists would continue to increase. And then, though I'm not stating any examples, there is an increase in such works, and it has becoming a recent trend.

Looking at this, it'll become a new genre by itself, like 'schools with unique abilities', 'demon kings' and 'little sisters'.

Tragically, I thought of this three years ago, but it's likely that people thought I only caught onto this fad later on! Now's the time to publish it! No time to waste!

That was how it was—and so I suddenly made up my mind to write it at a very fast pace. The last time I wrote so much and so long was probably when I submitted my entry for 'Kino's Journey'. How wonderful.

Finally, when I was done, I found out that the number of pages far exceeded my expectations, so what was supposed to be summarized in one volume ended up divided into two. I do apologize for not planning this thoroughly beforehand.

The next publication date will probably be the day when the Earth rotated 60 times from now (editorial branch note: Can't you just express it in 'two months later'?). There is still some time, so please sit with your abdomens raised and wait (Editorial branch's note: your body balance will be off if you do not train your back muscles at the same time),

The afterword of this First Part thus ends here. Sorry that I'm being 32% more serious than usual (compared to myself). Allow me to state beforehand that there is no continuation of the afterword inside the cover; do check around to see if there really is any.

See you in the next volume, when the Second half is published in March!

January 2014, Keiichi Sigsawa.

Hello, this is Kouhaku Kuroboshi.

Mr Sigsawa's new work has finally debuted!

Well, to put it somehow,

It really has a lot of his flair,

And surely it does give a feeling of something

That can't be simply summarized!

I too got engrossed and read it all at once.

Please wait a little while for the next volume.

こんにちは、黒星紅白です。
ついに始まりました。
時雨沢さんの新作！
やはりなんというか
時雨沢さんらしい、
一筋縄ではいがない
感じになっていますよね！
私も夢中になつて
一気に読み込んで
しまいました。

皆さんには下巻もうちょっと
待っててね。

